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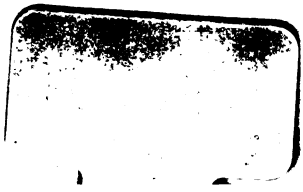

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CHILDREN OF THE BUSH

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CHILDREN OF THE BUSH

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CHILDREN OF THE BUSH

BY

HENRY LAWSON

Author of *While the Billy Boils; When the World was Wide, and Other Verses; Joe Wilson and his Mates; On the Track and Over the Sliprails; Verses, Popular and Humorous; When I was King, and Other Verses.*

SYDNEY
ANGUS AND ROBERTSON, LTD.
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1907

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INTRODUCTION

THE SHEARERS

NO church-bell rings them from the Track,
No pulpit lights their blindness—
'Tis hardship, drought and homelessness
That teach those Bushmen kindness:
The mateship born of barren lands,
Of toil and thirst and danger—
The camp-fare for the stranger set,
The first place to the stranger.

They do the best they can to-day—
Take no thought of the morrow;
Their way is not the old-world way—
They live to lend and borrow.
When shearing's done and cheques gone wrong,
They call it 'time to slither'—
They saddle up and say 'So-long!'
And ride—the Lord knows whither.

And though he may be brown or black,
Or wrong man there or right man,
The mate that's honest to his mates
They call that man a 'white man'!

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They tramp in mateship side by side—
  The Protestant and 'Roman'—
They call no biped lord or 'sir,'
  And touch their hats to no man!

They carry in their swags, perhaps,
  A portrait and a letter—
And, maybe, deep down in their hearts,
  The hope of 'something better.'
Where lonely miles are long to ride,
  And all days seem recurrent,
There's lots of time to think of men
  We might have been—but weren't.

They turn their faces to the west
  And leave the world behind them—
(Their drought-dried graves are seldom green
  Where even mates can find them).
They know too little of the world
  To rise to wealth or greatness:
But in this book of mine I pay—
  Pay tribute to their 'straightness.'

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CHILDREN OF THE BUSH

SEND ROUND THE HAT

Now this is the creed from the Book of the Bush—
Should be simple and plain to a dunce:
'If a man's in a hole you must pass round the hat—
Were he jail-bird or gentleman once.'

'IS it any harm to wake yer?'

It was about nine o'clock in the morning, and, though it was Sunday morning, it was no harm to wake me; but the shearer had mistaken me for a deaf Jackeroo, who was staying at the shanty and was something like me, and had good-naturedly shouted almost at the top of his voice, and he woke the whole shanty. Anyway he woke three or four others who were sleeping on beds and stretchers, and one on a shake-down on the floor, in the same room. It had been a wet night, and the shanty was full of shearers from Big Billabong Shed which had cut-out the day before. My room mates had been drinking and gambling over night, and they swore luridly at the intruder for disturbing them.

He was six-foot-three or thereabout. He was loosely built, bony, sandy-complexioned and grey eyed. He wore a good-humoured grin at most times, as I noticed later on; he was of a type of Bushman that I always liked—the sort that seem to get more good-natured the longer they grow, yet are hard-knuckled and would accommodate a man who

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wanted to fight, or thrash a bully in a good-natured way. The sort that like to carry somebody's baby round, and cut wood, carry water and do little things for overworked married Bush-women. He wore a saddle-tweed sac suit two sizes too small for him, and his face, neck, great hands and bony wrists were covered with sun blotches and freckles.

'I hope I ain't disturbing yer,' he shouted, as he bent over my bunk, 'but there's a cove—'

'You needn't shout!' I interrupted, 'I'm not deaf.'

'Oh—I beg your pardon!' he shouted. 'I didn't know I was yellin'. I thought you was the deaf feller.'

'Oh, that's all right,' I said. 'What's the trouble?'

'Wait till them other chaps is done swearin' and I'll tell yer,' he said. He spoke with a quiet, good-natured drawl, with something of the nasal twang, but tone and drawl distinctly Australian—altogether apart from that of the Americans.

'Oh, spit it out for Christ's sake, Long-un!' yelled One-eyed Bogan, who had been the worst swearer in a rough shed, and he fell back on his bunk as if his previous remarks had exhausted him.

'It's that there sick Jackeroo that was pickin'-up at Big Billabong,' said the Giraffe. 'He had to knock off the first week, an' he's been here ever since. They're sendin' him away to the hospital in Sydney by the speeshall train. They're just goin' to take him up in the waggonette to the railway station, an' I thought I might as well go round with the hat an' get him a few bob. He's got a missus and kids in Sydney.'

'Yer always goin' round with yer gory hat!' growled Bogan. 'Yer'd blanky well take it round in hell!'

'That's what he's doing, Bogan,' muttered 'Gentleman Once,' on the shakedown, with his face to the wall.

The hat was a genuine 'cabbage tree,' one of the sort that 'last a lifetime,' it was well coloured, almost black in

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fact with weather and age, and it had a new strap round the base of the crown. I looked into it and saw a dirty pound note and some silver. I dropped in half a crown, which was more than I could spare, for I had only been a green hand at Big Billabong.

'Thank yer!' he said. 'Now then, you fellers!'

'I wish you'd keep your hat on your head, and your money in your pockets and your sympathy somewhere else,' growled Jack Moonlight as he raised himself painfully on his elbow and felt under his pillow for two half-crowns. 'Here,' he said, 'here's two half-casers. Chuck 'em in and let me sleep for God's sake!'

'Gentleman Once,' the gambler, rolled round on his shake-down, bringing his good-looking, dissipated face from the wall. He had turned in in his clothes and, with considerable exertion he shoved his hand down into the pocket of his trousers, which were a tight fit. He brought up a roll of pound notes and could find no silver.

'Here,' he said to the Giraffe, 'I might as well lay a quid. I'll chance it anyhow. Chuck it in.'

'You've got rats this mornin', Gentleman Once,' growled the Bogan. 'It ain't a blanky horse race.'

'P'raps I have,' said Gentleman Once, and he turned to the wall again with his head on his arm.

'Now, Bogan, yer might as well chuck in somethin',' said the Giraffe.

'What's the matter with the —— Jackeroo?' asked the Bogan, tugging his trousers from under the mattress.

Moonlight said something in a low tone.

'The —— he has!' said Bogan. 'Well, I pity the ——! Here, I'll chuck in half a —— quid!' and he dropped half a sovereign into the hat.

The fourth man, who was known to his face as 'Barcoo-Rot,' and behind his back as 'the Mean Man,' had been drinking all night, and not even Bogan's stump-splitting adjectives could rouse him. So Bogan got out of

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bed, and calling on us (as blanky female cattle) to witness what he was about to do, he rolled the drunkard over, prospected his pockets till he made up five shillings (or a 'caser' in Bush language), and 'chucked' them into the hat.

And Barcoo-Rot is probably unconscious to this day that he was ever connected with an act of charity.

The Giraffe struck the deaf Jackeroo in the next room. I heard the chaps cursing 'Long-'un' for waking them, and 'Deaf-'un' for being, as they thought at first, the indirect cause of the disturbance. I heard the Giraffe and his hat being condemned in other rooms and cursed along the verandah where more shearers were sleeping; and after a while I turned out.

The Giraffe was carefully fixing a mattress and pillows on the floor of a waggonette, and presently a man, who looked like a corpse, was carried out and lifted into the trap.

As the waggonette started, the shanty keeper—a fat, soulless-looking man—put his hand in his pocket and dropped a quid into the hat which was still going round, in the hands of the Giraffe's mate, little Teddy Thompson, who was as far below medium height as the Giraffe was above it.

The Giraffe took the horse's head and led him along on he most level parts of the road towards the railway station, and two or three chaps went along to help get the sick man into the train.

The shearing season was over in that district, but I got a job of house painting, which was my trade, at the Great Western Hotel (a two-storey brick place), and I stayed in Bourke for a couple of months.

The Giraffe was a Victorian native from Bendigo. He was well known in Bourke and to many shearers who came through the great dry scrubs from hundreds of miles round. He was stakeholder, drunkard's banker, peacemaker where

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possible, referee or second to oblige the chaps when a fight was on, big brother or uncle to most of the children in town, final court of appeal when the youngsters had a dispute over a footrace at the school picnic, referee at their fights, and he was the stranger's friend.

'The feller as knows can battle around for himself,' he'd say. 'But I always like to do what I can for a hard-up stranger cove. I was a green hand Jackeroo once meself, and I know what it is.'

'You're always bothering about other people, Giraffe,' said Tom Hall, the Shearers' Union Secretary, who was only a couple of inches shorter than the Giraffe. 'There's nothing in it, you can take it from me—I ought to know.'

'Well, what's a feller to do?' said the Giraffe. 'I'm only hangin' round here till shearin' starts agen, an' a cove might as well be doin' something. Besides, it ain't as if I was like a cove that had old people or a wife an' kids to look after. I ain't got no responsibilities. A feller can't be doin' nothin'. Besides, I like to lend a helpin' hand when I can.'

'Well, all I've got to say,' said Tom, most of whose screw went in borrowed quids, etc. 'All I've got to say is that you'll get no thanks, and you might blanky well starve in the end.'

'There ain't no fear of me starvin' so long as I've got me hands about me; an' I ain't a cove as wants thanks,' said the Giraffe.

He was always helping someone or something. Now it was a bit of a 'darnce' that we was gettin' up for the girls; again it was Mrs Smith, the woman whose husban' was drowned in the flood in the Bogan River lars' Crismas, or that there poor woman down by the Billabong—her husban' cleared out and left her with a lot o' kids. Or Bill Something, the bullocky, who was run over by his own waggon, while he was drunk, and got his leg broke.

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Toward the end of his spree One-eyed Bogan broke loose and smashed nearly all the windows of the Carriers' Arms, and next morning he was fined heavily at the police court. About dinner time I encountered the Giraffe and his hat, with two half-crowns in it for a start.

'I'm sorry to trouble yer,' he said, 'but One-eyed Bogan carn't pay his fine, an' I thought we might fix it up for him. He ain't half a bad sort of feller when he ain't drinkin'. It's only when he gets too much booze in him.'

After shearing, the hat usually started round with the Giraffe's own dirty crumpled pound note in the bottom of it as a send-off, later on it was half a sovereign, and so on down to half a crown and a shilling, as he got short of stuff; till in the end he would borrow a 'few bob'—which he always repaid after next shearing—'just to start the thing goin'.'

There were several yarns about him and his hat. 'Twas said that the hat had belonged to his father, whom he resembled in every respect, and it had been going round for so many years that the crown was worn as thin as paper by the quids, half-quids, casers, half-casers, bobs and tanners or sprats—to say nothing of the scrums—that had been chucked into it in its time and shaken up.

They say that when a new governor visited Bourke the Giraffe happened to be standing on the platform close to the exit, grinning good-humouredly, and the local toady nudged him urgently and said in an awful whisper, 'Take off your hat! Why don't you take off your hat?'

'Why?' drawled the Giraffe, 'he ain't hard up, is he?'

And they fondly cherish an anecdote to the effect that, when the One-Man-One-Vote Bill was passed (or Payment of Members, or when the first Labour Party went in—I forget on which occasion they said it was) the Giraffe was carried away by the general enthusiasm, got a few beers in him, 'chucked' a quid into his hat, and sent it round.

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The boys contributed by force of habit, and contributed largely, because of the victory and the beer. And when the hat came back to the Giraffe, he stood holding it in front of him with both hands and stared blankly into it for a while. Then it dawned on him.

'Blowed if I haven't bin an' gone an' took up a bloomin' collection for meself!' he said.

He was almost a teetotaller, but he stood his shout in reason. He mostly drank ginger beer.

'I ain't a feller that boozes, but I ain't got nothin' agen chaps enjoyin' themselves, so long as they don't go too far.'

It was common for a man on the spree to say to him,—

'Here! here's five quid. Look after it for me, Giraffe, will yer, till I git off the booze.'

His real name was Bob Brothers, and his Bush names, 'Long-'un,' 'The Giraffe,' 'Send-round-the-hat,' 'Chuck-in-a-bob,' and 'Ginger-ale.'

Some years before, camels and Afghan drivers had been imported to the Bourke district; the camels did very well in the dry country, they went right across country and carried everything from sardines to flooring boards. And the teamsters loved the Afghans nearly as much as Sydney furniture makers love the cheap Chinese in the same line. They loved 'em even as union shearers on strike love blacklegs brought up-country to take their places.

Now the Giraffe was a good, straight unionist, but in cases of sickness or trouble he was as apt to forget his unionism, as all Bushmen are, at all times (and for all time), to forget their creed. So, one evening, the Giraffe blundered into the 'Carriers' Arms'—of all places in the world—when it was full of teamsters; he had his hat in his hand and some small silver and coppers in it.

'I say, you fellers, there's a poor, sick Afghan in the camp down there along the—'

A big, brawny bullock driver took him firmly by the

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shoulders, or, rather by the elbows, and ran him out before any damage was done. The Giraffe took it as he took most things, good-humouredly; but, about dusk, he was seen slipping down towards the Afghan camp with a billy of soup.

'I believe,' remarked Tom Hall, 'that when the Giraffe goes to heaven—and he's the only one of us, as far as I can see, that has a ghost of a show—I believe that when he goes to heaven, the first thing he'll do will be to take his infernal hat round amongst the angels—getting up a collection for this damned world that he left behind.'

'Well, I don't think there's so much to his credit, after all,' said Jack Mitchell, shearer. 'You see, the Giraffe is ambitious; he likes public life, and that accounts for him shoving himself forward with his collections. As for bothering about people in trouble, that's only common curiosity; he's one of those chaps that are always shoving their noses into other people's troubles. And, as for looking after sick men—why! there's nothing the Giraffe likes better than pottering round a sick man, and watching him and studying him. He's awfully interested in sick men, and they're pretty scarce out here. I tell you there's nothing he likes better—except, maybe, it's pottering round a corpse. I believe he'd ride forty miles to help and sympathise and potter round a funeral. The fact of the matter is that the Giraffe is only enjoying himself with other people's troubles—that's all it is. Its only vulgar curiosity and selfishness. I set it down to his ignorance; the way he was brought up.'

A few days after the Afghan incident the Giraffe and his hat had a run of luck. A German, one of a party who were building a new wooden bridge over the Big Billabong, was helping unload some girders from a truck at the railway station, when a big log slipped on the skids and his leg was smashed badly. They carried him to the Carriers' Arms, which was the nearest hotel, and into a

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bedroom behind the bar, and sent for the doctor. The Giraffe was in evidence as usual.

'It vas not that at all,' said German Charlie, when they asked him if he was in much pain. 'It vas not that at all. I don't cares a damn for der bain; but dis is der tird year —und I vas going home dis year—after der gontract—und der contract yoost commence!'

That was the burden of his song all through, between his groans.

There were a good few chaps sitting quietly about the bar and verandah when the doctor arrived. The Giraffe was sitting at the end of the counter, on which he had laid his hat while he wiped his face, neck and forehead with a big speckled 'sweat-rag.' It was a very hot day.

The doctor, a good-hearted young Australian, was heard saying something. Then German Charlie, in a voice that rung with pain,—

'Make that leg right, doctor—quick! Dis is der tird pluddy year—und I must go home!'

The doctor asked him if he was in great pain.

'Neffer mind der pluddy bain, doctor! Neffer mind der pluddy bain! Dot vas nossing. Make dat leg well quick, doctor. Dis vas der last gontract, and I vas going home dis year.' Then the words jerked out of him by physical agony: 'Der girl vas vaiting dree year, und—by Got! I must go home.'

The publican — Watty Braithwaite, known as 'Watty Broadweight,' or, more familiarly, 'Watty Bothways'— turned over the Giraffe's hat in a tired, bored sort of way, dropped a quid into it, and nodded resignedly at the Giraffe.

The Giraffe caught up the hint and the hat with alacrity. The hat went all round town, so to speak; and, as soon as his leg was firm enough not to come loose on the road German Charlie went home.

It was well known that I contributed to the *Sydney*

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Bulletin and several other papers. The Giraffe's bump of reverence was very large, and swelled especially for sick men and poets. He treated me with much more respect than is due from a Bushman to a man, and with an odd sort of extra gentleness I sometimes fancied. But one day he rather surprised me.

'I'm sorry to trouble yer,' he said in a shamefaced way. 'I don't know as you go in for sportin', but One-eyed Bogan an' Barcoo-Rot is goin' to have a bit of a scrap down the Billybong this evenin', an'—'

'A bit of a what?' I asked.

'A bit of fight to a finish,' he said apologetically. 'An' the chaps is tryin' to fix up a fiver to put some life into the thing. There's bad blood between One-eyed Bogan and Barcoo-Rot, an' it won't do them any harm to have it out.'

It was a great fight, I remember. There must have been a couple of score blood-soaked handkerchiefs (or 'sweat-rags') buried in a hole on the field of battle, and the Giraffe was busy the rest of the evening helping to patch up the principals. Later on he took up a small collection for the loser, who happened to be Barcoo-Rot in spite of the advantage of an eye.

The Salvation Army lassie, who went round with the *War Cry*, nearly always sold the Giraffe three copies.

A new-chum parson, who wanted a subscription to build or enlarge a chapel, or something, sought the assistance of the Giraffe's influence with his mates.

'Well,' said the Giraffe, 'I ain't a churchgoer meself. I ain't what you might call a religious cove, but I'll be glad to do what I can to help yer. I don't suppose I can do much. I ain't been to church since I was a kiddy.'

The parson was shocked, but later on he learned to appreciate the Giraffe and his mates, and to love Australia for the Bushman's sake, and it was he who told me the above anecdote.

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The Giraffe helped fix some stalls for a Catholic church bazaar, and some of the chaps chaffed him about it in the union office.

'You'll be taking up a collection for a Joss-House down in the Chinamen's camp next,' said Tom Hall in conclusion.

'Well, I ain't got nothin' agen the Roming Carflics,' said the Giraffe. 'An' Father O'Donovan's a very decent sort of cove. He stuck up for the unions all right in the strike anyway.' ('He wouldn't be Irish if he wasn't,' someone commented.) 'I carried swags once for six months with a feller that was a Carflick, an' he was a very straight feller. And a girl I knowed turned Carflick to marry a chap that had got her into trouble, an' she was always jes' the same to me after as she was before. Besides, I like to help everything that's goin' on.'

Tom Hall and one or two others went out hurriedly to have a drink. But we all loved the Giraffe.

He was very innocent and very humorous, especially when he meant to be most serious and philosophical.

'Some of them Bush girls is regular tomboys,' he said to me solemnly one day. 'Some of them is too cheeky altogether. I remember once I was stoppin' at a place—they was sort of relations o' mine—an' they put me to sleep in a room off the verander, where there was a glass door an' no blinds. An' the first mornin' the girls—they was sort o' cousins o' mine—they come gigglin' and foolin' round outside the door on the verander, an' kep' me in bed till nearly ten o'clock. I had to put me trowsis on under the bedclothes in the end. But I got back on 'em the next night,' he reflected.

'How did you do that, Bob?' I asked.

'Why, I went to bed in me trowsis!'

One day I was on a plank, painting the ceiling of the bar of the Great Western Hotel. I was anxious to get the

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job finished. The work had been kept back most of the day by chaps handing up long beers to me, and drawing my attention to the alleged fact that I was putting on the paint wrong side out. I was slapping it on over the last few boards when,—

'I'm very sorry to trouble yer; I always seem to be troublin' yer; but there's that there woman and them girls—'

I looked down—about the first time I had looked down on him—and there was the Giraffe, with his hat brim up on the plank and two half-crowns in it.

'Oh, that's all right, Bob,' I said, and I dropped in half a crown.

There were shearers in the bar, and presently there was some barracking. It appeared that that there woman and them girls were strange women, in the local as well as the Biblical sense of the word, who had come from Sydney at the end of the shearing season, and had taken a cottage on the edge of the scrub on the outskirts of the town. There had been trouble this week in connection with a row at their establishment, and they had been fined, warned off by the police, and turned out by their landlord.

'This is a bit too red hot, Giraffe,' said one of the shearers. 'Them ——s has made enough out of us coves. They've got plenty of stuff, don't you fret. Let 'em go to ——! I'm blanked if I give a sprat.'

'They ain't got their fares to Sydney,' said the Giraffe. 'An', what's more, the little 'un is sick, an' two of them has kids in Sydney.'

'How the —— do you know?'

'Why, one of 'em come to me an' told me all about it.'

There was an involuntary guffaw.

'Look here, Bob,' said Billy Woods, the Rouseabout's Secretary, kindly. 'Don't you make a fool of yourself. You'll have all the chaps laughing at you. Those girls are only working you for all you're worth. I suppose one of

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'em came crying and whining to you. Don't you bother about them. *You* don't know them; they can pump water at a moment's notice. You haven't had any experience with women yet, Bob.'

'She didn't come whinin' and cryin' to me,' said the Giraffe, dropping his twanging drawl a little. 'She looked me straight in the face an' told me all about it.'

'I say, Giraffe,' said Box-o'-Tricks, 'what have you been doin'? You've bin down there on the nod. I'm surprised at yer, Giraffe.'

'An' he pretends to be so gory soft an' innocent too,' growled the Bogan. 'We know all about you, Giraffe.'

'Look here, Giraffe,' said Mitchell the shearer. 'I'd never have thought it of you. We all thought you were the only virgin youth west the river; I always thought you were a moral young man. You mustn't think that because your conscience is pricking you everyone else's is.'

'I ain't had anythin' to do with them,' said the Giraffe, drawling again. 'I ain't a cove that goes in for that sort of thing. But other chaps has, and I think they might as well help 'em out of their fix.'

'They're a rotten crowd,' said Billy Woods. 'You don't know them, Bob. Don't bother about them—they're not worth it. Put your money in your pocket. You'll find a better use for it before next shearing.'

'Better shout, Giraffe,' said Box-o'-Tricks.

Now in spite of the Giraffe's softness he was the hardest man in Bourke to move when he'd decided on what he thought was 'the fair thing to do.' Another peculiarity of his was that on occasion, such for instance as 'sayin' a few words' at a strike meeting, he would straighten himself, drop the twang, and rope in his drawl, so to speak.

'Well, look here, you chaps,' he said now. 'I don't know anything about them women. I s'pose they're bad, but I don't suppose they're worse than men has made

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them. All I know is that there's four women turned out, without any stuff, and every woman in Bourke, an' the police, an' the law agen 'em. An' the fact that they is women is agenst 'em most of all. You don't expect 'em to hump their swags to Sydney! Why, only I ain't got the stuff I wouldn't trouble yer. I'd pay their fares meself. Look,' he said, lowering his voice, 'there they are now, an' one of the girls is cryin'. Don't let 'em see yer lookin'.'

I dropped softly from the plank and peeped out with the rest.

They stood by the fence on the opposite side of the street, a bit up towards the railway station, with their portmanteaux and bundles at their feet. One girl leant with her arms on the fence rail and her face buried in them, another was trying to comfort her. The third girl and the woman stood facing our way. The woman was good-looking; she had a hard face, but it might have been made hard. The third girl seemed half defiant, half inclined to cry. Presently she went to the other side of the girl who was crying on the fence and put her arm round her shoulder. The woman suddenly turned her back on us and stood looking away over the paddocks.

The hat went round. Billy Woods was first, then Box-o'-Tricks, and then Mitchell.

Billy contributed with eloquent silence. 'I was only jokin', Giraffe,' said Box-o'-Tricks, dredging his pockets for a couple of shillings. It was some time after the shearing, and most of the chaps were hard up.

'Ah, well,' sighed Mitchell. 'There's no help for it. If the Giraffe would take up a collection to import some decent girls to this God-forgotten hole there might be some sense in it. . . . It's bad enough for the Giraffe to undermine our religious prejudices, and tempt us to take a morbid interest in sick chows and Afghans, and blacklegs and widows; but when he starts mixing us up with strange women it's time to buck.' And he prospected his pockets

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and contributed two shillings, some odd pennies, and a pinch of tobacco dust.

'I don't mind helping the girls, but I'm damned if I'll give a penny to help the old ——' said Tom Hall.

'Well, she was a girl once herself,' drawled the Giraffe.

The Giraffe went round to the other pubs and to the union offices, and when he returned he seemed satisfied with the plate, but troubled about something else.

'I don't know what to do for them for to-night,' he said. 'None of the pubs or boardin'-houses will hear of them, an' there ain't no empty houses, an' the women is all agen 'em.'

'Not all,' said Alice, the big, handsome barmaid from Sydney. 'Come here, Bob.' She gave the Giraffe half a sovereign and a look for which some of us would have paid him ten pounds—had we had the money, and had the look been transferable.

'Wait a minute, Bob,' she said, and she went in to speak to the landlord.

'There's an empty bedroom at the end of the store in the yard,' she said when she came back. 'They can camp there for to-night if they behave themselves. You'd better tell 'em, Bob.'

'Thank yer, Alice,' said the Giraffe.

Next day, after work, the Giraffe and I drifted together and down by the river in the cool of the evening, and sat on the edge of the steep, drought-parched bank.

'I heard you saw your lady friends off this morning, Bob,' I said, and was sorry I said it, even before he answered.

'Oh, they ain't no friends of mine,' he said. 'Only four poor devils of women. I thought they mightn't like to stand waitin' with the crowd on the platform, so I jest offered to get their tickets an' told 'em to wait round at the back of the station till the bell rung. . . . An' what do yer think they did, Harry?' he went on, with an exasperatingly unintelligent grin. 'Why, they wanted to kiss me.'

'Did they?'

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'Yes. An' they would have done it, too, if I hadn't been so long. . . . Why, I'm blessed if they didn't kiss me hands.'

'You don't say so.'

'God's truth. Somehow I didn't like to go on the platform with them after that; besides they was cryin', and I can't stand women cryin'. But some of the chaps put them into an empty carriage.' He thought a moment. Then,—

'There's some terrible good-hearted fellers in the world,' he reflected.

I thought so too.

'Bob,' I said, 'you're a single man. Why don't you get married and settle down?'

'Well,' he said, 'I ain't got no wife an' kids, that's a fact. But it ain't my fault.'

He may have been right about the wife. But I thought of the look that Alice had given him, and—

'Girls seem to like me right enough,' he said, 'but it don't go no further than that. The trouble is that I'm so long, and I always seem to get shook after little girls. At least there was one little girl in Bendigo that I was properly gone on.'

'And wouldn't she have you?'

'Well, it seems not.'

'Did you ask her?'

'Oh, yes, I asked her right enough.'

'Well, and what did she say?'

'She said it would be redicilus for her to be seen trottin' alongside of a chimbly like me.'

'Perhaps she didn't mean that. There are any amount of little women who like tall men.'

'I thought of that too—afterwards. P'r'aps she didn't mean it that way. I s'pose the fact of the matter was that she didn't cotton on to me, and wanted to let me down easy. She didn't want to hurt me feelin's, if yer understand—she was a very good-hearted little girl. There's some terrible

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tall fellers where I come from, and I know two as married little girls.'

He seemed a hopeless case.

'Sometimes,' he said, 'sometimes I wish that I wasn't so blessed long.'

'There's that there deaf Jackeroo,' he reflected presently. 'He's something in the same fix about girls as I am. He's too deaf and I'm too long.'

'How do you make that out?' I asked. 'He's got three girls, to my knowledge, and, as for being deaf, why, he gasses more than any man in the town, and knows more of what's going on than old Mother Brindle the washer-woman.'

'Well, look at that now!' said the Giraffe, slowly. 'Who'd have thought it? He never told me he had three girls, an' as for hearin' news, I always tell him anything that's goin' on that I think he doesn't catch. He told me his trouble was that whenever he went out with a girl people could hear what they was sayin'—at least they could hear what she was sayin' to him, an' draw their own conclusions, he said. He said he went out one night with a girl, and some of the chaps foxed 'em an' heard her sayin' "don't" to him, an' put it all round town.'

'What did she say "don't" for?' I asked.

'He didn't tell me that, but I s'pose he was kissin' her or huggin' her or something.'

'Bob,' I said presently, 'didn't you try the little girl in Bendigo a second time?'

'No,' he said. 'What was the use. She was a good little girl, and I wasn't goin' to go botherin' her. I ain't the sort of cove that goes hangin' round where he isn't wanted. But somehow I couldn't stay about Bendigo after she gave me the hint, so I thought I'd come over an' have a knock round on this side for a year or two.'

'And you never wrote to her?'

'No. What was the use of goin' pesterin' her with letters?

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I know what trouble letters give me when I have to answer one. She'd have only had to tell me the straight truth in a letter an' it wouldn't have done me any good. But I've pretty well got over it by this time.'

A few days later I went to Sydney. The Giraffe was the last I shook hands with from the carriage window, and he slipped something in a piece of newspaper into my hand.

'I hope yer won't be offended,' he drawled, 'but some of the chaps thought you mightn't be too flush of stuff—you've been shoutin' a good deal; so they put a quid or two together. They thought it might help yer to have a bit of a fly round in Sydney.

I was back in Bourke before next shearing. On the evening of my arrival I ran against the Giraffe; he seemed strangely shaken over something, but he kept his hat on his head.

'Would yer mind takin' a stroll as fur as the Billerbong?' he said. 'I got something I'd like to tell yer.'

His big, brown, sun-burnt hands trembled and shook as he took a letter from his pocket and opened it.

'I've just got a letter,' he said. 'A letter from that little girl at Bendigo. It seems it was all a mistake. I'd like you to read it. Somehow I feel as if I want to talk to a feller, and I'd rather talk to you than any of them other chaps.'

It was a good letter, from a big-hearted little girl. She had been breaking her heart for the great ass all these months. It seemed that he had left Bendigo without saying good-bye to her. 'Somehow I couldn't bring meself to it,' he said, when I taxed him with it. She had never been able to get his address until last week; then she got it from a Bourke man who had gone South. She called him 'an' awful long fool,' which he was, without the slightest doubt, and she implored him to write, and come back to her.

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'And will you go back, Bob?' I asked.

'My oath! I'd take the train to-morrer only I ain't got the stuff. But I've got a stand in Big Billerbong shed an' I'll soon knock a few quid together. I'll go back as soon as ever shearin's over. I'm goin' to write away to her to-night.'

The Giraffe was the 'ringer' of Big Billabong Shed that season. His tallies averaged 120 a day. He only sent his hat round once during shearing, and it was noticed that he hesitated at first and only contributed half a crown. But then it was a case of a man being taken from the shed by the police for wife desertion.

'It's always that way,' commented Mitchell. 'Those soft, good-hearted fellows always end by getting hard and selfish. The world makes 'em so. It's the thought of the soft fools they've been that finds out sooner or later and makes 'em repent. Like as not the Giraffe will be the meanest man out-back before he's done.'

When Big Billabong cut out, and we got back to Bourke with our dusty swags and dirty cheques, I spoke to Tom Hall,—

'Look here, Tom,' I said. 'That long fool, the Giraffe, has been breaking his heart for a little girl in Bendigo ever since he's been out-back, and she's been breaking her heart for him, and the ass didn't know it till he got a letter from her just before Big Billabong started. He's going to-morrow morning.'

That evening Tom stole the Giraffe's hat. 'I s'pose it'll turn up in the mornin', said the Giraffe. 'I don't mind a lark,' he added, 'but it does seem a bit red hot for the chaps to collar a cove's hat and a feller goin' away for good, p'r'aps, in the mornin'.'

Mitchell started the thing going with a quid.

'It's worth it,' he said, 'to get rid of him. We'll have some peace now. There won't be so many accidents or women in trouble when the Giraffe and his blessed hat are

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gone. Anyway, he's an eyesore in the town, and he's getting on my nerves for one. . . . Come on, you sinners! Chuck 'em in; we're only taking quids and half-quids.'

About daylight next morning Tom Hall slipped into the Giraffe's room at the 'Carriers' Arms.' The Giraffe was sleeping peacefully. Tom put the hat on a chair by his side. The collection had been a record one, and, besides the packet of money in the crown of the hat, there was a silver-mounted pipe with case—the best that could be bought in Bourke, a gold brooch, and several trifles—besides an ugly valentine of a long man in his shirt walking the room with a twin on each arm.

Tom was about to shake the Giraffe by the shoulder, when he noticed a great foot, with about half a yard of big-boned ankle and shank, sticking out at the bottom of the bed. The temptation was too great. Tom took up the hair-brush, and, with the back of it, he gave a smart rap on the point of an in-growing toe-nail, and slithered.

We heard the Giraffe swearing good-naturedly for a while, and then there was a pregnant silence. He was staring at the hat we supposed.

We were all up at the station to see him off. It was rather a long wait. The Giraffe edged me up to the other end of the platform.

He seemed overcome.

'There's—there's some terrible good-hearted fellers in this world,' he said. 'You mustn't forgit 'em, Harry, when you make a big name writin'. I'm—well, I'm blessed if I don't feel as if I was jist goin' to blubber!'

I was glad he didn't. The Giraffe blubberin' would have been a spectacle. I steered him back to his friends.

'Ain't you going to kiss me, Bob?' said the Great Western's big, handsome barmaid, as the bell rang.

'Well, I don't mind kissin' you, Alice,' he said, wiping his mouth. 'But I'm goin' to be married, yer know.' And he kissed her fair on the mouth.

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'There's nothin' like gettin' into practice,' he said, grinning round.

We thought he was improving wonderfully; but at the last moment something troubled him.

'Look here, you chaps,' he said hesitatingly, with his hand in his pocket, 'I don't know what I'm going to do with all this stuff. There's that there poor washerwoman that scalded her legs liftin' the boiler of clothes off the fire—'

We shoved him into the carriage. He hung—about half of him—out the window, wildly waving his hat, till the train disappeared in the scrub.

And, as I sit here writing by lamplight at mid-day, in the midst of a great city of shallow social sham, of hopeless, squalid poverty, of ignorant selfishness, cultured or brutish, and of noble and heroic endeavour frowned down or callously neglected, I am almost aware of a burst of sunshine in the room, and a long form leaning over my chair, and,—

'Excuse me for troublin' yer; I'm always troublin' yer; but there's that there poor woman. . . .'

And I wish I could immortalise him!

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'G. S.,' OR THE FOURTH COOK

HE has notions of Australia from the tales that he's been told—
Land of leggings and revolvers, land of savages and gold;
So he begs old shirts, and someone patches up his worn-out duds.
He is shipped as 'general servant,' scrubbing pots and peeling spuds
(In the steamer's grimy alley, hating man and peeling spuds).

There is little time to comfort, there is little time to cry—
He will come back with a fortune—'We'll be happy by-and-by!'
Scarcely time to kiss his sweetheart, barely time to change his duds,
Ere they want him at the galley, and they set him peeling spuds
(With a butcher's knife, a bucket, and, say, half a ton of spuds).

And he peels 'em hard to Plymouth, peels 'em fast to drown his grief,
Peels 'em while his stomach sickens on the road to Teneriffe;
Peels 'em while the donkey rattles, peels 'em while the engine thuds,
By the time they touch at Cape Town he's a don at peeling spuds
(And he finds some time for dreaming as he gets on with the spuds).

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In the steamer's slushy alley, where the souls of men are dead,
And the adjectives are crimson if the substances are red,
He's perhaps a college black-sheep, and, maybe, of ancient blood—
Ah! his devil grips him sometimes as he reaches for a spud
(And he jerks his head and sadly gouges dry-rot from a spud).

And his brave heart hopes and sickens as the weary days go round;
There is plenty time for blue-lights ere they reach King George's Sound.
But he gets his best suit ready—two white shirts and three bone studs!
He will face the new world bravely when he's finished with the spuds
(And next week, perhaps, he'll gladly take a job at peeling spuds).

There were heroes in Australia went exploring long ago;
There are heroes in Australia that the world shall never know;
And the men we use for heroes in the land of droughts and floods
Often win their way to Sydney scrubbing pots and peeling spuds
(Plucky beggars! brave, poor devils! gouging dry-rot from their spuds).

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THAT PRETTY GIRL IN THE ARMY

'Now I often sit at Watty's, when the night is very near,
With a head that's full of jingles—and the fumes of bottled beer;
For I always have a fancy that, if I am over there
When the Army prays for Watty, I'm included in the prayer.

'It would take a lot of praying, lots of thumping on the drum,
To prepare our sinful, straying, erring souls for Kingdom Come.
But I love my fellow-sinners! and I hope, upon the whole,
That the Army gets a hearing when it prays for Watty's soul.'

From *When the World was Wide.*

THE Salvation Army does good business in some of the out-back towns of the great pastoral wastes of Australia. There's the thoughtless, careless generosity of the Bushman, whose pockets don't go far enough down his trousers (that's what's the matter with him), and who contributes to anything that comes along, without troubling to ask questions, like long Bob Brothers of Bourke, who, chancing to be 'a Protestant by rights,' unwittingly subscribed towards the erection of a new Catholic church, and, being chaffed for his mistake, said,—

'Ah, well, I don't suppose it'll matter a hang in the end, anyway it goes. I ain't got nothink agenst the Roming Carflicks.'

There's the shearer, fresh with his cheque from a cut-out shed, gloriously drunk and happy, in love with all the world, and ready to subscribe towards any creed and shout for all hands—including Old Nick if he happened to come along. There's the shearer, half drunk and inclined to be nasty,

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who has got the wrong end of all things with a tight grip, and who flings a shilling in the face of out-back conventionality (as he thinks) by chucking a bob into the Salvation Army ring. Then he glares round to see if he can catch anybody winking behind his back. There's the cynical joker, a queer mixture, who contributes generously and tempts the reformed boozer afterwards. There's the severe-faced old station hand — in clean shirt and neckerchief and white moleskins—in for his annual or semi-annual spree, who contributes on principle, and then drinks religiously until his cheque is gone and the horrors are come. There's the shearer, feeling mighty bad after a spree, and in danger of seeing things when he tries to go to sleep. He has dropped ten or twenty pounds over bar counters and at cards, and he now 'chucks' a repentant shilling into the ring, with a very private and rather vague sort of feeling that something might come of it. There's the stout, contented, good-natured publican, who tips the Army as if it were a barrel-organ. And there are others and other reasons—black sheep and ne'er-do-weels—and faint echoes of other times in Salvation Army tunes.

Bourke, the metropolis of the Great Scrubs, on the banks of the Darling River, about 500 miles from Sydney, was suffering from a long drought when I was there in '92; and the heat may or may not have been another cause contributing to the success, from a business point of view, of the Bourke garrison. There was much beer boozing—and, besides, it was vaguely understood (as most things are vaguely understood out there in the drought-haze) that the place the Army came to save us from was hotter than Bourke. We didn't hanker to go to a hotter place than Bourke. But that year there was an extraordinary reason for the Army's great financial success there.

She was a little girl, nineteen or twenty, I should judge, the prettiest girl I ever saw in the Army, and one of the prettiest I've ever seen out of it. She had the features of

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an angel, but her expression was wonderfully human, sweet and sympathetic. Her big grey eyes were sad with sympathy for sufferers and sinners, and her poke bonnet was full of bunchy, red-gold hair. Her first appearance was somewhat dramatic—perhaps the Army arranged it so.

The Army used to pray, and thump the drum, and sing, and take up collections every evening outside Watty Bothway's Hotel, the 'Carriers' Arms.' They performed longer and more often outside Watty's than any other pub in town—perhaps because Watty was considered the most hopeless publican and his customers the hardest crowd of boozers in Bourke. The band generally began to play about dusk. Watty would lean back comfortably in a basket easy-chair on his wide verandah, and clasp his hands, in a calm, contented way, while the Army banged the drum and got steam up, and whilst, perhaps, there was a barney going on in the bar, or a bloodthirsty fight in the backyard. On such occasions there was something like an indulgent or fatherly expression on his fat and usually emotionless face. And by-and-by he'd move his head gently and doze. The banging and the singing seemed to soothe him, and the praying, which was often very personal, never seemed to disturb him in the least.

Well, it was about dusk one day; it had been a terrible day, a hundred and something startling in the shade, but there came a breeze after sunset. There had been several dozen of buckets of water thrown on the verandah floor and the ground outside. Watty was seated in his accustomed place when the Army arrived. There was no barney in the bar because there was a fight in the backyard, and that claimed the attention of all the customers.

The Army prayed for Watty and his clients; then a reformed drunkard started to testify against publicans and all their works. Watty settled himself comfortably, folded his hands, and leaned back and dozed.

The fight was over, and the chaps began to drop round

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to the bar. The man who was saved waved his arms, and danced round and howled.

'Ye-es!' he shouted hoarsely. 'The publicans, and boozers, and gamblers, and sinners may think that Bourke is hot, but hell is a thousand times hotter! I tell you—'

'Oh, Lord!' said Mitchell, the shearer, and he threw a penny into the ring.

'Ye-es! I tell you that hell is a million times hotter than Bourke! I tell you—'

'Oh, look here,' said a voice from the background, 'that won't wash. Why, don't you know that when the Bourke people die they send back for their blankets?'

The saved brother glared round.

'I hear a freethinker speaking, my friends,' he said. Then, with sudden inspiration and renewed energy, 'I hear the voice of a freethinker. Show me the face of a freethinker,' he yelled, glaring round like a hunted, hungry man. 'Show me the face of a freethinker, and I'll tell you what he is.'

Watty hitched himself into a more comfortable position and clasped his hands on his knee and closed his eyes again.

'Ya-a-a-s!' shrieked the brand. 'I tell you, my friends, I can tell a freethinker by his face. Show me the face of a—'

At this point there was an interruption. One-eyed, or Wall-eyed, Bogan, who had a broken nose, and the best side of whose face was reckoned the ugliest and most sinister—One-eyed Bogan thrust his face forward from the ring of darkness into the torchlight of salvation. He had got the worst of a drawn battle; his nose and mouth were bleeding, and his good eye was damaged.

'Look at my face!' he snarled, with dangerous earnestness. 'Look at my face! That's the face of a freethinker, and I don't care who knows it. Now! what have you got to say against my face, "Man-without-a-Shirt?"'

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The brother drew back. He had been known in the North-West in his sinful days as 'Man-without-a-Shirt,' *alias* 'Shirty,' or 'The Dirty Man,' and was flabbergasted at being recognised in speech. Also, he had been in a shearing shed and in a shanty orgie with One-eyed Bogan, and knew the man.

Now most of the chaps respected the Army, and, indeed, anything that looked like religion, but the Bogan's face, as representing free-thought, was a bit too sudden for them. There were sounds on the opposite side of the ring as from men being smitten repeatedly and rapidly below the belt, and long Tom Hall and one or two others got away into the darkness in the background, where Tom rolled helplessly on the grass and sobbed.

It struck me that Bogan's face was more the result of free speech than anything else.

The Army was about to pray when the Pretty Girl stepped forward, her eyes shining with indignation and enthusiasm. She had arrived by the evening train, and had been standing shrinkingly behind an Army lass of fifty Australian summers, who was about six feet high, flat and broad, and had a square face, and a mouth like a joint in boiler plates.

The Pretty Girl stamped her pretty foot on the gravel, and her eyes flashed in the torchlight.

'You ought to be ashamed of yourselves,' she said. 'Great big men like you to be going on the way you are. If you were ignorant or poor, as I've seen people, there might be some excuse for you. Haven't you got any mothers, or sisters, or wives to think of? What sort of a life is this you lead? Drinking, and gambling, and fighting, and swearing your lives away! Do you ever think of God and the time when you were children? Why don't you make homes? Look at that man's face!' (she pointed suddenly at Bogan, who collapsed and sidled behind his mates out of the light). 'Look at that man's face! Is it

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a face for a Christian? And you help and encourage him to fight. You're worse than he is. Oh, it's brutal. It's—it's wicked. Great big men like you, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves.'

Long Bob Brothers—about six-foot-four—the longest and most innocent there, shrunk down by the wall and got his inquiring face out of the light. The Pretty Girl fluttered on for a few moments longer, greatly excited, and then stepped back, seemingly much upset, and was taken under the wing of the woman with the boiler-plate mouth.

It was a surprise, and very sudden. Bogan slipped round to the backyard, and was seen bathing his battered features at the pump. The rest wore the expression of men who knew that something unusual has happened, but don't know what, and are waiting vacantly for developments.—Except Tom Hall, who had recovered and returned. He stood looking over the head of the ring of Bushmen, and apparently taking the same critical interest in the girl as he would in a fight—his expression was such as a journalist might wear who is getting exciting copy.

The Army had it all their own way for the rest of the evening, and made a good collection. The Pretty Girl stood smiling round with shining eyes as the bobs and tanners dropped in, and then, being shoved forward by the flat woman, she thanked us sweetly, and said we were good fellows, and that she was sorry for some things she'd said to us. Then she retired, fluttering and very much flushed, and hid herself behind the hard woman—who, by the way, had an excrescence on her upper lip which might have stood for a rivet.

Presently the Pretty Girl came from behind the big woman and stood watching things with glistening eyes. Some of the chaps on the opposite side of the ring moved a little to one side and all were careful not to meet her eye—not to be caught looking at her—lest she should be embarrassed. Watty had roused himself a little at the

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sound of a strange voice in the Army (and such a clear, sweet voice too!) and had a look; then he settled back peacefully again, but it was noticed that he didn't snore that evening.

And when the Army prayed, the Pretty Girl knelt down with the rest on the gravel. One or two tall Bushmen bowed their heads as if they had to, and One-eyed Bogan, with the blood washed from his face, stood with his hat off, glaring round to see if he could catch anyone sniggering.

Mitchell, the shearer, said afterwards that the whole business made him feel for the moment like he felt sometimes in the days when he used to feel things.

The town discussed the Pretty Girl in the Army that night and for many days thereafter, but no one could find out who she was or where she belonged to—except that she came from Sydney last. She kept her secret, if she had one, very close—or else the other S.-A. women were not to be pumped. She lived in skillion-rooms at the back of the big weatherboard Salvation Army barracks with two other 'lassies,' who did washing and sewing and nursing, and went shabby, and half starved themselves, and were baked in the heat, like scores of women in the Bush, and even as hundreds of women, suffering from religious mania, slave and stint in city slums, and neglect their homes, husbands and children—for the glory of Booth.

The Pretty Girl was referred to as Sister Hannah by the Army people, and came somehow to be known by sinners as 'Miss Captain.' I don't know whether that was her real name or what rank she held in the Army, if indeed she held any.

She sold *War Crys*, and the circulation doubled in a day. One-eyed Bogan, being bailed up unexpectedly, gave her 'half a caser' for a *Cry*, and ran away without the paper or the change. Jack Mitchell bought a *Cry* for the first time in his life, and read it. He said he found some of the articles intensely realistic, and many of the statements were

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very interesting. He said he read one or two things in the *Cry* that he didn't know before. Tom Hall, taken unawares, bought three *Crys* from the Pretty Girl, and blushed to find it fame.

Little Billy Woods, the Labourers' Union Secretary—who had a poetic temperament and more than the average Bushman's reverence for higher things—Little Billy Woods told me in a burst of confidence that he generally had two feelings, one after the other, after encountering that girl. One was that unfathomable far-away feeling of loneliness and longing, that comes at odd times to the best of married men, with the best of wives and children—as Billy had. The other feeling, which came later on, and was a reaction in fact, was the feeling of a man who thinks he's been twisted round a woman's little finger for the benefit of somebody else. Billy said that he couldn't help being reminded by the shy, sweet smile and the shy, sweet 'thank you' of the Pretty Girl in the Army, of the shy, sweet smile and the shy, sweet gratitude of a Sydney private barmaid, who had once roped him in, in the days before he was married. Then he'd reckon that the Army lassie had been sent out back to Bourke as a business speculation.

Tom Hall was inclined to reckon so too—but that was after he'd been chaffed for a month about the three *War Crys*.

The Pretty Girl was discussed from psychological points of view; not forgetting the sex problem. Donald Macdonald—shearer, union leader and labour delegate to other colonies on occasion—Donald Macdonald said that whenever he saw a circle of plain or ugly, dried-up women or girls round a shepherd, evangelist or a Salvation Army drum, he'd say 'sexually starved!' They were hungry for love. Religious mania was sexual passion dammed out of its course. Therefore he held that morbidly religious girls were the most easily seduced.

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But this couldn't apply to Pretty Girl in the Army. Mitchell reckoned that she'd either had a great sorrow—a lot of trouble, or a disappointment in love (the 'or' is Mitchell's); but they couldn't see how a girl like her could possibly be disappointed in love—unless the chap died or got into jail for life. Donald decided that her soul had been starved somehow.

Mitchell suggested that it might be only a craving for notoriety, the same thing that makes women and girls go amongst lepers, and out to the battlefield, and nurse ugly pieces of men back to life again; the same thing that makes some women and girls swear ropes round men's necks. The Pretty Girl might be the daughter of well-to-do people—even aristocrats, said Mitchell—she was pretty enough and spoke well enough. 'Every woman's a barmaid at heart,' as the *Bulletin* puts it, said Mitchell.

But not even one of the haggard women of Bourke ever breathed a suspicion of scandal against her. They said she was too good and too pretty to be where she was. You see it was not as in an old settled town where hags blacken God's world with their tongues. Bourke was just a little camping town in a big land, where free, good-hearted democratic Australians, and the best of black sheep from the old world were constantly passing through; where husbands were often obliged to be away from home for twelve months, and the storekeepers had to trust the people, and mates trusted each other, and the folks were broad-minded. The mind's eye had a wide range.

After her maiden speech the Pretty Girl seldom spoke, except to return thanks for collections—and she never testified. She had a sweet voice and used to sing.

Now, if I were writing pure fiction, and were not cursed with an obstinate inclination to write the truth, I might say that, after the advent of the Pretty Girl, the morals of Bourke improved suddenly and wonderfully. That One-eyed Bogan left off gambling and drinking and fighting

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and swearing, and put on a red coat and testified and fought the devil only; that Mitchell dropped his mask of cynicism; that Donald Macdonald ate no longer of the tree of knowledge and ceased to worry himself with psychological problems, and was happy; and that Tom Hall was no longer a scoffer. That no one sneaked round through the scrub after dusk to certain necessary establishments in weather-board cottages on the outskirts of the town; and that the broad-minded and obliging ladies thereof became Salvation Army lassies.

But none of these things happened. Drunks quieted down or got out of the way if they could when the Pretty Girl appeared on the scene, fights and games of 'headin' 'em' were adjourned, and weak, ordinary language was used for the time being, and that was about all.

Nevertheless, most of the chaps were in love with that Pretty Girl in the Army—all those who didn't *worship* her privately. Long Bob Brothers hovered round in hopes, they said, that she'd meet with an accident—get run over by a horse or something—and he'd have to carry her in; he scared the women at the barracks by dropping firewood over the fence after dark. Barcoo-Rot, the meanest man in the back country, was seen to drop a threepenny bit into the ring, and a rumour was industriously circulated (by Tom Hall) to the effect that One-eyed Bogan intended to shave and join the Army disguised as a lassie.

Handsome Jake Boreham (*alias* Bore-'em), a sentimental shearer from New Zealand, who had read Bret Harte, made an elaborate attempt for the Pretty Girl, by pretending to be going to the dogs headlong, with an idea of first winning her sorrowful interest and sympathy, and then making an apparently hard struggle to straighten up for her sake. He related his experience with the cheerful and refreshing absence of reserve which was characteristic of him, and is of most Bushmen.

'I'd had a few drinks,' he said, 'and was having a spell

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under a gum by the river, when I saw the Pretty Girl and another Army woman coming down along the bank. It was a blazing hot day. I thought of Sandy and the Schoolmistress in Bret Harte, and I thought it would be a good idea to stretch out in the sun and pretend to be helpless; so I threw my hat on the ground and lay down, with my head in the blazing heat, in the most graceful position I could get at, and I tried to put a look of pained regret on my face, as if I was dreaming of my lost boyhood and me mother. I thought, perhaps, the Girl would pity me, and I felt sure she'd stoop and pick up my hat and put it gently over my poor troubled head. Then I was going to become conscious for a moment, and look hopelessly round, and into her eyes, and then start and look sorrowful and ashamed, and stagger to my feet, taking off my hat like the Silver King does to the audience when he makes his first appearance drunk on the stage; and then I was going to reel off, trying to walk as straight as I could. And next day I was going to clean up my teeth and nails and put on a white shirt, and start to be a new man henceforth.

'Well, as I lay there with my eyes shut, I heard the footsteps come up and stop, and heard 'em whisper, and I thought I heard the Pretty Girl say "Poor fellow!" or something that sounded like that; and just then I got a God-almighty poke in the ribs with an umbrella—at least I suppose it was aimed for my ribs; but women are bad shots, and the point of the umbrella caught me in the side, just between the bottom rib and the hip bone, and I sat up with a click, like the blade of a pocket-knife.

'The other lassie was the big square-faced woman. The Pretty Girl looked rather more frightened and disgusted than sentimental, but she had plenty of pluck, and soon pulled herself together. She said I ought to be ashamed of myself, a great, big man like me, lying there in the dust like a drunken tramp—an eyesore and a disgrace to all the world. She told me to go to my camp, wherever

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that was, and sleep myself sober. The square-jawed woman said I looked like a fool sitting there. I did feel ashamed, and I reckon I did look like a fool—a man generally does in a fix like that. I felt like one, anyway. I got up and walked away, and it hurt me so much that I went over to West Bourke and went to the dogs properly for a fortnight, and lost twenty quid on a game of draughts against a blindfold player. Now both those women had umbrellas, but I'm not sure to this day which of 'em it was that gave me the poke. It wouldn't have mattered much anyway. I haven't borrowed one of Bret Harte's books since.'

Jake reflected a while.

'The worst of it was,' he said ruefully, 'that I wasn't sure that the girl or the woman didn't see through me, and that worried me a bit. You never can tell how much a woman suspects, and that's the worst of 'em. I found that out after I got married.'

The Pretty Girl in the Army grew pale and thin and bigger-eyed. The women said it was a shame, and that she ought to be sent home to her friends, wherever they were. She was laid up for two or three days, and some of the women cooked delicacies and handed 'em over the barracks fence, and offered to come in and nurse her; but the square woman took washing home and nursed the girl herself.

The Pretty Girl still sold *War Crys* and took up collections, but in a tired, listless, half shamed-faced way. It was plain that she was tired of the Army, and growing ashamed of the Salvationists. Perhaps she had come to see things too plainly.

You see, the Army does no good out-back in Australia —except from a business point of view. It is simply there to collect funds for hungry headquarters. The Bushmen are much too intelligent for the Army. There was no poverty in Bourke—as it is understood in the city; there was plenty of food; and camping out and roughing it come natural to the Bushmen. In cases of sickness, accident, widows or

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orphans, the chaps sent round the hat, without banging a drum or testifying, and that was all right. If a chap was hard up he borrowed a couple of quid from his mate. If a strange family arrived without a penny, someone had to fix 'em up, and the storekeepers helped them till the man got work. For the rest, we work out our own salvation, or damnation—as the case is—in the Bush, with no one to help us, except a mate, perhaps. The Army can't help us, but a fellow-sinner can, sometimes, who has been through it all himself. The Army is only a drag on the progress of Democracy, because it attracts many who would otherwise be aggressive Democrats—and for other reasons.

Besides, if we all reformed the Army would get deuced little from us for its city missions.

The Pretty Girl went to service for a while with the Stock Inspector's wife, who could get nothing out of her concerning herself or her friends. She still slept at the barracks, stuck to the Army, and attended its meetings.

. . . . . .

It was Christmas morning, and there was peace in Bourke and goodwill towards all men. There hadn't been a fight since yesterday evening, and that had only been a friendly one, to settle an argument concerning the past ownership, and, at the same time, to decide as to the future possession of a dog.

It had been a hot, close night, and it ended in a suffocating sunrise. The free portion of the male population were in the habit of taking their blankets and sleeping out in 'the Park,' or town square, in hot weather; the wives and daughters of the town slept, or tried to sleep, with bedroom windows and doors open, while husbands lay outside on the verandahs. I camped in a corner of the park that night, and the sun woke me.

As I sat up I caught sight of a swagman coming along the white, dusty road from the direction of the bridge, where he cleared road ran across west and on, a hundred and

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thirty miles, through the barren, broiling mulga scrubs, to Hungerford, on the border of Sheol. I knew that swagman's walk. It was John Merrick (Jack Moonlight), one time Shearers' Union Secretary at Coonamble, and generally 'Rep' (Shearers' Representative) in any shed where he sheared. He was a 'better-class shearer,' one of those quiet, thoughtful men of whom there are generally two or three in the roughest of rough sheds, who have great influence, and give the shed a good name from a Union point of view. Not quiet with the resentful or snobbish reserve of the educated Englishman, but with a sad or subdued sort of quietness that has force in it—as if they fully realised that their intelligence is much higher than the average, that they have suffered more real trouble and heartbreak than the majority of their mates, and that their mates couldn't possibly understand them if they spoke as they felt and couldn't see things as they do—yet men who understand and are intensely sympathetic in their loneliness and sensitive reserve.

I had worked in a shed with Jack Moonlight, and had met him in Sydney, and to be mates with a Bushman for a few weeks is to know him well—anyway, I found it so. He had taken a trip to Sydney the Christmas before last, and when he came back there was something wanting. He became more silent, he drank more, and sometimes alone, and took to smoking heavily. He dropped his mates, took little or no interest in Union matters, and travelled alone, and at night.

The Australian Bushman is born with a mate who sticks to him through life—like a mole. They may be hundreds of miles apart sometimes, and separated for years, yet they are mates for life. A Bushman may have many mates in his roving, but there is always one *his* mate, 'my mate'; and it is common to hear a Bushman, who is, in every way, a true mate to the man he happens to be travelling with, speak of *his mate's mate*—'Jack's mate'—who might be in Klondyke or South Africa. A Bushman has always a mate

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to comfort him and argue with him, and work and tramp and drink with him, and lend him quids when he's hard up, and call him a b—— fool, and fight him sometimes; to abuse him to his face and defend his name behind his back; to bear false witness and perjure his soul for his sake; to lie to the girl for him if he's single, and to his wife if he's married; to secure a 'pen' for him at a shed where he isn't on the spot, or, if the mate is away in New Zealand or South Africa, to write and tell him if it's any good coming over this way. And each would take the word of the other against all the world, and each believes that the other is the straightest chap that ever lived — 'a white man!' And next best to your old mate is the man you're tramping, riding, working or drinking with.

About the first thing the cook asks you when you come along to a shearers' hut is, 'Where's your mate?' I travelled alone for a while one time, and it seemed to me sometimes, by the tone of the inquiry concerning the whereabouts of my mate, that the Bush had an idea that I might have done away with him and that the thing ought to be looked into.

When a man drops mateship altogether and takes to 'hatting' in the Bush, it's a step towards a convenient tree and a couple of saddle-straps buckled together.

I had an idea that I, in a measure, took the place of Jack Moonlight's mate about this time.

''Ullo, Jack!' I hailed as he reached the corner of the park.

'Good morning, Harry!' said Jack, as if he'd seen me last yesterday evening instead of three months ago. 'How are you getting on?'

We walked together towards the Union Office, where I had a camp in the skillion-room at the back. Jack was silent. But there's no place in the world where a man's silence is respected so much (within reasonable bounds) as in the Australian Bush, where every man has

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a past more or less sad, and every man a ghost—perhaps from other lands that we know nothing of, and speaking in a foreign tongue. They say in the Bush, 'Oh, Jack's only thinking!' And they let him think. Generally you want to think as much as your mate; and when you've been together some time it's quite natural to travel all day without exchanging a word. In the morning Jim says, 'Well, I think I made a bargain with that horse, Bill,' and some time late in the afternoon, say twenty miles further on, it occurs to Bill to 'rejoin,' 'Well, I reckon the blank as sold it to you had yer proper!'

I like a good thinking mate, and I believe that thinking in company is a lot more healthy and more comfortable, as well as less risky, than thinking alone.

On the way to the Union Office Jack and I passed the Royal Hotel, and caught a glimpse, through the open door of a bedroom off the verandah, of the landlord's fresh, fair, young Sydney girl-wife, sleeping prettily behind the mosquito net, like a sleeping beauty, while the boss lay on a mattress outside on the verandah, across the open door. (He wasn't necessary for publication, but an evidence of good faith.)

I glanced at Jack for a grin, but didn't get one. He wore the pained expression of a man who is suddenly hit hard with the thought of something that might have been.

I boiled the billy and fried a pound of steak.

'Been travelling all night, Jack?' I asked.

'Yes,' said Jack. 'I camped at Emus yesterday.'

He didn't eat. I began to reckon that he was brooding too much for his health. He was much thinner than when I saw him last, and pretty haggard, and he had something of the hopeless, haggard look that I'd seen in Tom Hall's eyes after the last big shearing strike, when Tom had worked day and night to hold his mates up

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all through the hard, bitter struggle, and the battle was lost.

'Look here, Jack!' I said at last. 'What's up?'

'Nothing's up, Harry,' said Jack. 'What made you think so?'

'Have you got yourself into any fix?' I asked. 'What's the Hungerford track been doing to you?'

'No, Harry,' he said, 'I'm all right. How are you?' And he pulled some string and papers and a roll of dusty pound notes from his pocket and threw them on the bunk.

I was hard up just then, so I took a note and the billy to go to the Royal and get some beer. I thought the beer might loosen his mind a bit.

'Better take a couple of quid,' said Jack. 'You look as if you want some new shirts and things.' But a pound was enough for me, and I think he had reason to be glad of that later on, as it turned out.

'Anything new in Bourke?' asked Jack as we drank the beer.

'No,' I said, 'not a thing,—except there's a pretty girl in the Salvation Army.'

'And it's about time,' growled Jack.

'Now, look here, Jack,' I said presently, 'what's come over you lately at all? I might be able to help you. It's not a bit of use telling me that there's nothing the matter. When a man takes to brooding and travelling alone it's a bad sign, and it will end in a leaning tree and a bit of clothes-line as likely as not. Tell me what the trouble is. Tell us all about it. There's a ghost, isn't there?'

'Well, I suppose so,' said Jack. 'We've all got our ghosts for that matter. But never you mind, Harry; I'm all right. I don't go interfering with your ghosts, and I don't see what call you've got to come haunting mine. Why, it's as bad as kicking a man's dog.' And he gave the ghost of a grin.

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'Tell me, Jack,' I said, 'is it a woman?'

'Yes,' said Jack, 'it's a woman. Now, are you satisfied?'

'Is it a girl?' I asked.

'Yes,' he said.

So there was no more to be said. I'd thought it might have been a lot worse than a girl. I'd thought he might have got married somewhere, sometime, and made a mess of it.

We had dinner at Billy Wood's place, and a sensible Christmas dinner it was—everything cold, except the vegetables, with the hose going on the verandah in spite of the bye-laws, and Billy's wife and her sister, fresh and cool-looking and jolly, instead of being hot and brown and cross like most Australian women who roast themselves over a blazing fire in a hot kitchen on a broiling day, all the morning, to cook scalding plum pudding and red-hot roasts, for no other reason than that their grandmothers used to cook hot Christmas dinners in England.

And in the afternoon we went for a row on the river, pulling easily up the anabranch and floating down with the stream under the shade of the river timber—instead of going to sleep and waking up helpless and soaked in perspiration, to find the women with headaches, as many do on Christmas Day in Australia.

Mrs Woods tried to draw Jack out, but it was no use, and in the evening he commenced drinking, and that made Billy uneasy. 'I'm afraid Jack's on the wrong track,' he said.

After tea most of us collected about Watty's verandah. Most things that happened in Bourke happened at Watty's pub, or near it.

If a horse bolted with a buggy or cart, he was generally stopped outside Watty's, which seemed to suggest, as Mitchell said, that most of the heroes drank at Watty's—also that the pluckiest men were found amongst the hardest

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drinkers. (But sometimes the horse fetched up against Watty's sign and lamp-post—which was a stout one of 'iron-bark'—and smashed the trap.) Then Watty's was the 'Carriers' Arms,' a Union pub; and Australian teamsters are mostly hard cases: while there was something in Watty's beer which made men argue fluently, and the best fights came off in his backyard. Watty's dogs were the most quarrelsome in town, and there was a dog-fight there every other evening, followed as often as not by a man-fight. If a Bushman's horse ran away with him the chances were that he'd be thrown on to Watty's verandah, if he wasn't pitched into the bar; and victims of accidents, and sick, hard-up shearers, were generally carried to Watty's pub, as being the most convenient and comfortable for them. Mitchell denied that it was generosity or good nature on Watty's part, he said it was all business—advertisement. Watty knew what he was doing. He was very deep, was Watty. Mitchell further hinted that if he was sick *he* wouldn't be carried to Watty's, for Watty knew what a thirsty business a funeral was. Tom Hall reckoned that Watty bribed the Army on the quiet.

I was sitting on a stool along the verandah wall with Donald Macdonald, Bob Brothers (the Giraffe) and Mitchell, and one or two others, and Jack Moonlight sat on the floor with his back to the wall and his hat well down over his eyes. The Army came along at the usual time, but we didn't see the Pretty Girl at first—she was a bit late. Mitchell said he liked to be at Watty's when the Army prayed and the Pretty Girl was there; he had no objection to being prayed for by a girl like that, though he reckoned that nothing short of a real angel could save him now. He said his old grandmother used to pray for him every night of her life and three times on Sunday, with Christmas Day extra when Christmas Day didn't fall on a Sunday; but Mitchell reckoned that the old lady couldn't have had much influence because he became more sinful every year,

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and went deeper in ways of darkness, until finally he embarked on a career of crime.

The Army prayed, and then a thin 'ratty' little woman bobbed up in the ring; she'd gone mad on religion as women do on woman's rights and hundreds of other things. She was so skinny in the face, her jaws so prominent, and her mouth so wide, that when she opened it to speak it was like a ventriloquist's dummy and you could almost see the cracks open down under her ears.

'They say I'm cracked!' she screamed in a shrill, cracked voice. 'But I'm not cracked—I'm only cracked on the Lord Jesus Christ! That's all I'm cracked on—.' And just then the Amen man of the Army—the Army groaner we called him, who was always putting both feet in it—just then he blundered forward, rolled up his eyes, threw his hands up and down as if he were bouncing two balls, and said, with deep feeling,—

'Thank the Lord she's got a crack in the right place!'

Tom Hall doubled up, and most of the other sinners seemed to think there was something very funny about it. And the Army, too, seemed struck with an idea that there was something wrong somewhere, for they started a hymn.

A big American negro, who'd been a night watchman in Sydney, stepped into the ring and waved his arms and kept time, and as he got excited he moved his hands up and down rapidly, as if he was hauling down a rope in a great hurry through a pulley block above, and he kept saying, 'Come down, Lord!' all through the hymn, like a bass accompaniment, 'Come down, Lord; Come down, Lord; Come down, Lord; Come down, Lord!' and the quicker he said it the faster he hauled. He was as good as a drum. And, when the hymn was over, he started to testify.

'My Frens!' he said, 'I was once black as der coals in der mined! I was once black as der ink in der ocean of sin! But now—thank an' bless the Lord!—I am whiter dan der dribben snow!'

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Tom Hall sat down on the edge of the verandah and leaned his head against a post and cried. He had contributed a bob this evening, and he was getting his money's worth.

Then the Pretty Girl arrived and was pushed forward into the ring. She looked thinner and whiter than I'd ever seen her, and there was a feverish brightness in her eyes that I didn't like.

'Men!' she said, 'this is Christmas Day—.' I didn't hear any more for, at the sound of her voice, Jack Moonlight jumped up as if he'd sat on a baby. He started forward, stared at her for a moment as if he couldn't believe his eyes, and then said 'Hannah!' short and sharp. She started as if she was shot, gave him a wild look, and stumbled forward; the next moment he had her in his arms and was steering for the private parlour.

I heard Mrs Bothways calling for water and smelling-salts; she was as fat as Watty, and very much like him in the face, but she was emotional and sympathetic. Then presently I heard, through the open window, the Pretty Girl say to Jack, 'Oh, Jack, Jack! Why did you go away and leave me like that? It was cruel!'

'But you told me to go, Hannah,' said Jack.

'That—that didn't make any difference. Why didn't you write?' she sobbed.

'Because you never wrote to me, Hannah,' he said.

'That—that was no excuse!' she said. 'It was so k-k-k-cruel of you, Jack—.'

Mrs Bothways pulled down the window. A newcomer asked Watty what the trouble was, and he said that the Army girl had only found her chap, or husband, or long-lost brother or something, but the missus was looking after the business; then he dozed again.

And then we adjourned to the Royal and took the Army with us.

'That's the way of it,' said Donald Macdonald. 'With

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a woman it's love or religion; with a man it's love or the devil.'

'Or with a man,' said Mitchell, presently, 'it's love and the devil both, sometimes, Donald.'

I looked at Mitchell hard, but for all his face expressed he might only have said, 'I think it's going to rain.'

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'LORD DOUGLAS'

'They hold him true, who's true to one,
However false he be—'
The Rouseabout of Rouseabouts.

THE Imperial Hotel was rather an unfortunate name for an out-back town pub, for out-back is the stronghold of Australian democracy; it was the out-back vote and influence that brought about 'One Man One Vote,' 'Payment of Members,' and most of the democratic legislation of late years, and from out-back came the overwhelming vote in favour of Australian as against Imperial Federation.

The name Royal Hotel is as familiar as that of the Railway Hotel, and passes unnoticed and ungrowled at, even by Bush republicans. The Royal Hotel at Bourke was kept by an Irishman, one O'Donohoo, who was Union to the backbone, loudly in favour of 'Australia for the Australians,' and, of course, against even the democratic New South Wales Government of the time. He went round town all one St Patrick's morning with a bunch of green ribbon fastened to his coat-tail with a large fish-hook, and wasn't aware of the fact till he sat down on the point of it. But that's got nothing to do with it.

The Imperial Hotel at Bourke was unpopular from the first. It was said that the very existence of the house was the result of a swindle. It had been built with money borrowed on certain allotments in the centre of the town and on the understanding that it should be built on the mortgaged land, whereas it was erected on a free allotment.

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Which fact was discovered, greatly to its surprise, by the building society when it came to foreclose on the allotments some years later. While the building was being erected the Bourke people understood, in a vague way, that it was to be a convent (perhaps the building society thought so, too), and when certain ornaments in brick and cement in the shape of a bishop's mitre were placed over the corners of the walls the question seemed decided. But when the place was finished a bar was fitted up, and up went the sign, to the disgust of the other publicans, who didn't know a licence had been taken out—for licensing didn't go by local option in those days. It was rumoured that the place belonged to, and the whole business was engineered by, a priest. And priests are men of the world.

The Imperial Hotel was patronised by the Pastoralists, the civil servants, the bank manager and clerks—all the scrub aristocracy; it was the headquarters of the *Pastoralists' Union* in Bourke; a barracks for blacklegs brought up from Sydney to take the place of Union shearers on strike; and the new Governor, on his inevitable visit to Bourke, was banqueted at the Imperial Hotel. The editor of the local 'Capitalistic rag' stayed there; the Pastoralists' member was elected mostly by dark ways and means devised at the Imperial Hotel, and one of its managers had stood as a dummy candidate to split the Labour vote; the management of the hotel was his reward. In short, it was there that most of the plots were hatched to circumvent Freedom, and put away or deliver into the clutches of law and order certain sons of Light and Liberty who believed in converting blacklegs into jellies by force of fists when bribes, gentle persuasion and pure Australian language failed to convert them to clean Unionism. The Imperial Hotel was called the 'Squatters' Pub,' the 'Scabbery,' and other and more expressive names.

The hotel became still more unpopular after Percy Douglas had managed it for a while. He was an avowed

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enemy of Labour Unionists. He employed Chinese cooks, and that in the height of the anti-Chinese agitation in Australia, and he was known to have kindly feelings towards the Afghans who, with their camels, were running white carriers off the roads. If an excited Unionist called a man a 'blackleg' or 'scab' in the Imperial bar he was run out—sometimes with great difficulty, and occasionally as far as the lock-up.

Percy Douglas was a fine-looking man, 'wid a chest on him an' well hung—a fine fee-*gure* of a man,' as O'Donohoo pronounced it. He was tall and erect, he dressed well, wore small side whiskers, had an eagle nose, and looked like an aristocrat. Like many of his type, who start sometimes as billiard-markers and suddenly become hotel managers in Australia, nothing was known of his past. Jack Mitchell reckoned, by the way he treated his *employés* and spoke to workmen, that he was the educated son of an English farmer—gone wrong and sent out to Australia. Someone called him 'Lord Douglas,' and the nickname caught on.

He made himself well hated. He got One-eyed Bogan 'three months' hard' for taking a bottle of whisky off the Imperial bar counter because he (Bogan) was drunk and thirsty and had knocked down his cheque, and because there was no one minding the bar at the moment.

Lord Douglas dismissed the barmaid, and, as she was leaving, he had her boxes searched and gave her in charge for stealing certain articles belonging to the hotel. The chaps subscribed to defend the case, and subsequently put a few pounds together for the girl. She proved her gratitude by bringing a charge of a baby against one of the chaps—but that was only one of the little ways of the world, as Mitchell said. She joined a Chinese camp later on.

Lord Douglas employed a carpenter to do some work about the hotel, and because the carpenter left before the job was finished Lord Douglas locked his tools in an

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outhouse and refused to give them up; and when the carpenter, with the spirit of an Australian workman, broke the padlock and removed his tool-chest, the landlord gave him in charge for breaking and entering. The chaps defended the case and won it, and hated Lord Douglas as much as if he were their elder brother. Mitchell was the only one to put in a word for him.

'I've been puzzling it out,' said Mitchell, as he sat nursing his best leg in the Union Office, 'and, as far as I can see, it all amounts to this—We're all mistaken in Lord Douglas. We don't know the man. He's all right. We don't understand him. He's really a sensitive, good-hearted man who's been shoved a bit off the track by the world. It's the world's fault—he's not to blame. You see, when he was a youngster he was the most good-natured kid in the school; he was always soft, and, consequently, he was always being imposed upon, and bullied, and knocked about. Whenever he got a penny to buy lollies he'd count 'em out carefully and divide 'em round amongst his schoolmates and brothers and sisters. He was the only one that worked at home, and consequently they all hated him. His father respected him, but didn't love him, because he wasn't a younger son, and wasn't bringing his father's grey hairs down in sorrow to the grave. If it was in Australia, probably Lord Douglas was an elder son and had to do all the hard graft, and teach himself at night, and sleep in a bark skillion while his younger brothers benefited—they were born in the new brick house and went to boarding-schools. His mother had a contempt for him because he wasn't a black sheep and a prodigal, and, when the old man died, the rest of the family got all the stuff and Lord Douglas was kicked out because they could do without him now. And the family hated him like poison ever afterwards (especially his mother), and spread lies about him—because they had treated him shamefully and because his mouth was shut—they knew he wouldn't speak. Then probably he went in for Democ-

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racy and worked for Freedom, till Freedom trod on him once too often with her hob-nailed boots. Then the chances are, in the end, he was ruined by a girl or woman, and driven, against his will, to take refuge in pure individualism. He's all right, only we don't appreciate him. He's only fighting against his old ideals—his old self that comes up sometimes—and that's what makes him sweat his barmaids and servants, and hate us, and run us in; and perhaps when he cuts up extra rough it's because his conscience kicks him when he thinks of the damned soft fool he used to be. He's all right—take my word for it. It's all a mask. Why, he might be one of the kindest-hearted men in Bourke underneath.'

Tom Hall rubbed his head and blinked, as if he was worried by an idea that there might be some facts in Mitchell's theories.

'You're allers findin' excuses for blacklegs an' scabs, Mitchell,' said Barcoo-Rot, who took Mitchell seriously (and who would have taken a laughing jackass seriously). 'Why, you'd find a white spot on a squatter. I wouldn't be surprised if you blacklegged yourself in the end.'

This was an unpardonable insult, from a Union point of view, and the chaps half-unconsciously made room on the floor for Barcoo-Rot to fall after Jack Mitchell hit him. But Mitchell took the insult philosophically.

'Well, Barcoo-Rot,' he said, nursing the other leg, 'for the matter of that, I did find a white spot on a squatter once. He lent me a quid when I was hard up. There's white spots on the blackest characters if you only drop prejudice and look close enough. I suppose even Jack-the-Ripper's character was speckled. Why, I can even see spots on your character, sometimes, Barcoo-Rot. I've known white spots to spread on chaps' characters until they were little short of saints. Sometimes I even fancy I can feel my own wings sprouting. And as for turning blackleg—well, I suppose I've got a bit of the crawler in my composi-

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tion (most of us have), and a man never knows what might happen to his principles."

'Well,' said Barcoo-Rot, 'I beg yer pardon—ain't that enough?'

'No,' said Mitchell, 'you ought to wear a three-bushel bag and ashes for three months, and drink water; but since the police would send you to an asylum if you did that, I thing the best thing we can do is to go out and have a drink.'

Lord Douglas married an Australian girl somewhere, somehow, and brought her to Bourke, and there were two little girls—regular little fairies. She was a gentle, kind-hearted little woman, but she didn't seem to improve him much, save that he was very good to her.

'It's mostly that way,' commented Mitchell, 'When a boss gets married and has children he thinks he's got a greater right to grind his fellowmen and rob their wives and children. I'd never work for a boss with a big family—it's hard enough to keep a single boss nowadays in this country.'

After one stormy election, at the end of a long and bitter shearing strike, One-eyed Bogan, his trusty enemy, Barcoo-Rot, and one or two other enthusiastic reformers were charged with rioting, and got from one to three months' hard. And they had only smashed three windows of the Imperial Hotel and chased the Chinese cook into the river.

'I used to have some hopes for Democracy,' commented Mitchell, 'but I've got none now. How can you expect Liberty, Equality or Fraternity—how can you expect Freedom and Universal Brotherhood and Equal Rights in a country where Sons of Light get three months' hard for breaking windows and bashing a Chinaman? It almost makes me long to sail away in a gallant barque.'

There were other cases in connection with the rotten-

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egging of Capitalistic candidates on the Imperial Hotel balcony, and it was partly on the evidence of Douglas and his friends that certain respectable Labour Leaders got heavy terms of imprisonment for rioting and 'sedition' and 'inciting,' in connection with organised attacks on blacklegs and their escorts.

Retribution, if it was retribution, came suddenly and in a most unexpected manner to Lord Douglas.

It seems he employed a second carpenter for six months to repair and make certain additions to the hotel, and put him off under various pretences until he owed him a hundred pounds or thereabout. At last, immediately after an exciting interview with Lord Douglas, the carpenter died suddenly of heart disease. The widow, a strong-minded Bushwoman, put a bailiff in the hotel on a very short notice—and against the advice of her lawyer, who thought the case hopeless—and the Lord Douglas bubble promptly burst. He had somehow come to be regarded as the proprietor of the hotel, but now the real proprietors or proprietor—he was still said to be a priest—turned Douglas out and put in a new manager. The old servants were paid after some trouble. The local storekeepers and one or two firms in Sydney, who had large accounts against the Imperial Hotel (and had trusted it, mainly because it was patronised by Capitalism and Fat), were never paid.

Lord Douglas cleared out to Sydney, leaving his wife and children, for the present, with her brother, a hay-and-corn storekeeper, who also had a large and hopeless account against the hotel; and when the brother went broke and left the district she rented a two-roomed cottage and took in dressmaking.

Dressmaking didn't pay so well in the Bush then as it did in the old diggings' days when sewing-machines were scarce and the possession of one meant an independent living to any girl—when diggers paid ten shillings for a strip of 'flannen' doubled over and sewn together, with

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holes for arms and head, and called a shirt. Mrs Douglas had a hard time, with her two little girls, who were still better and more prettily dressed than any other children in Bourke. One grocer still called on her for orders and pretended to be satisfied to wait 'till Mr Douglas came back,' and when she would no longer order what he considered sufficient provisions for her and the children, and commenced buying sugar, etc., by the pound, for cash, he one day sent a box of groceries round to her. He pretended it was a mistake.

'However,' he said, 'I'd be very much obliged if you could use 'em, Mrs Douglas. I'm overstocked now; haven't got room for another tin of sardines in the shop. Don't you worry about bills, Mrs Douglas; I can wait till Douglas comes home. I did well enough out of the Imperial Hotel when your husband had it, and a pound's worth o' groceries won't hurt me now. I'm only too glad to get rid of some of the stock.'

She cried a little, thought of the children, and kept the groceries.

'I suppose I'll be sold up soon meself if things don't git brighter,' said that grocer to a friend, 'so it doesn't matter much.'

The same with Foley the butcher, who had a brogue with a sort of drawling groan in it, and was a cynic of the Mitchell school.

'You see,' he said, 'she's as proud as the devil, but when I send round a bit o' rawst, or porrk, or the undercut o' the blade-bawn, she thinks o' the little gur-r-ls before she thinks o' sendin' it back to me. That's where I've got the pull on her.'

The Giraffe borrowed a horse and tip-dray one day at the beginning of winter and cut a load of firewood in the Bush, and next morning, at daylight, Mrs Douglas was nearly startled out of her life by a crash at the end of the cottage, which made her think that the chimney had

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fallen in, or a tree fallen on the house; and when she slipped on a wrapper and looked out, she saw a load of short-cut wood by the chimney, and caught a glimpse of the back view of the Giraffe, who stood in the dray with his legs wide apart and was disappearing into the edge of the scrub; and soon the rapid clock-clock-clock of the wheels died away in the west, as if he were making for West Australia.

The next we heard of Lord Douglas he had got two years' hard for embezzlement in connection with some canvassing he had taken up. Mrs Douglas fell ill—a touch of brain-fever—and one of the labourer's wives took care of the children while two others took turns in nursing. While she was recovering, Bob Brothers sent round the hat, and, after a conclave in the Union Office—as mysterious as any meeting ever called with the object of downing bloated Capitalism—it was discovered that one of the chaps —who didn't wish his name to be mentioned—had borrowed just twenty-five pounds from Lord Douglas in the old days and now wished to return it to Mrs Douglas. So the thing was managed, and if she had any suspicions she kept them to herself. She started a little fancy goods shop and got along fairly comfortable.

Douglas, by the way, was, publicly, supposed, for her sake and because of the little girls, to be away in West Australia on the gold-fields.

Time passes without much notice out-back, and one hot day, when the sun hung behind the fierce sandstorms from the north-west as dully lurid as he ever showed in a London fog, Lord Douglas got out of the train that had just finished its five-hundred-miles' run, and not seeing a new-chum porter, who started forward by force of habit to take his bag, he walked stiffly off the platform and down the main street towards his wife's cottage.

He was very gaunt, and his eyes, to those who passed

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him closely, seemed to have a furtive, hunted expression. He had let his beard grow, and it had grown grey.

It was within a few days of Christmas—the same Christmas that we lost the pretty girl in the Salvation Army. As a rule the big shearing sheds within a fortnight of Bourke cut out in time for the shearers to reach the town and have their Christmas dinners and sprees—and for some of them to be locked up over Christmas Day—within sound of a church-going bell. Most of the chaps gathered in the Shearers' Union Office on New Year's Eve and discussed Douglas amongst other things.

'I vote we kick the cow out of the town!' snarled One-eyed Bogan, viciously.

'We can't do that,' said Bob Brothers (the Giraffe), speaking more promptly than usual. 'There's his wife and youngsters to consider, yer know.'

'He something well deserted his wife,' snarled Bogan, 'an' now he comes crawlin' back to her to keep him.'

'Well,' said Mitchell, mildly, 'but we ain't all got as much against him as you have, Bogan.'

'He made a crimson jail-bird of me!' snapped Bogan.

'Well,' said Mitchell, 'that didn't hurt you much, anyway; it rather improved your character if anything. Besides, he made a jail-bird of himself afterwards, so you ought to have a fellow-feeling—a feathered feeling, so to speak. Now you needn't be offended, Bogan, we're all jail-birds at heart, only we haven't all got the pluck.'

'I'm in favour of blanky well tarrin' an' featherin' him an' kickin' him out of the town!' shouted Bogan. "It would be a good turn to his wife, too; she'd be well rid of the ——'

'Perhaps she's fond of him,' suggested Mitchell; 'I've known such cases before. I saw them sitting together on the verandah last night when they thought no one was looking.'

'He deserted her,' said One-eyed Bogan, in a climbing-down tone, 'and left her to starve.'

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'Perhaps the police were to blame for that,' said Mitchell. 'You know you deserted all your old mates once for three months, Bogan, and it wasn't your fault—'

'He seems to be a crimson pet of yours, Jack Mitchell,' said Bogan, firing up.

'Ah, well, all I know,' said Mitchell, standing up and stretching himself wearily, 'all I know is that he looked like a gentleman once, and treated us like a gentleman, and cheated us like a gentleman, and ran some of us in like a gentleman, and, as far as I can see, he's served his time like a gentleman and come back to face us and live himself down like a man. I always had a sneaking regard for a gentleman.'

'Why, Mitchell, I'm beginning to think you are a gentleman yourself,' said Jake Boreham.

'Well,' said Mitchell, 'I used to have a suspicion once that I had a drop of blue blood in me somewhere, and it worried me a lot; but I asked my old mother about it one day, and she scalded me—God bless her!—and father chased me with a stockwhip, so I gave up making inquiries.'

'You'll join the bloomin' Capitalists next,' sneered One-eyed Bogan.

'I wish I could, Bogan,' said Mitchell. 'I'd take a trip to Paris and see for myself whether the Frenchwomen are as bad as they're made out to be, or go to Japan. But what are we going to do about Douglas?'

'Kick the skunk out of town, or boycott him!' said one or two. 'He ought to be tarred and feathered and hanged.'

'Couldn't do worse than hang him,' commented Jake Boreham, cheerfully.

'Oh, yes, we could,' said Mitchell, sitting down, resting his elbows on his knees, and marking his points with one forefinger on the other. 'For instance, we might boil him slow in tar. We might skin him alive. We might put him

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in a cage and poke him with sticks, with his wife and children in another cage to look on and enjoy the fun.'

The chaps, who had been sitting quietly listening to Mitchell, and grinning, suddenly became serious and shifted their positions uneasily.

'But I can tell you what would hurt his feelings more than anything else we could do,' said Mitchell.

'Well, what is it, Jack?' said Tom Hall, rather impatiently.

'Send round the hat and take up a collection for him,' said Mitchell, 'enough to let him get away with his wife and children and start life again in some less respectable town than Bourke. You needn't grin, I'm serious about it.'

There was a thoughtful pause, and one or two scratched their heads.

'His wife seems pretty sick,' Mitchell went on in a reflective tone. 'I passed the place this morning and saw him scrubbing out the floor. He's been doing a bit of house painting for old Heegard to-day. I suppose he learnt it in jail. I saw him at work and touched my hat to him.'

'What!' cried Tom Hall, affecting to shrink from Mitchell in horror.

'Yes,' said Mitchell, 'I'm not sure that I didn't take my hat off. Now I know it's not Bush religion for a man to touch his hat, except to a funeral, or a strange roof or woman sometimes; but when I meet a braver man than myself I salute him. I've only met two in my life.'

'And who were they, Jack?' asked Jake Boreham.

'One,' said Mitchell—'one is Douglas, and the other—well, the other was the man I used to be. But that's got nothing to do with it.'

'But perhaps Douglas thought you were crowing over him when you took off your hat to him—sneerin' at him, like, Mitchell,' reflected Jake Boreham.

'No, Jake,' said Mitchell, growing serious suddenly.

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'There are ways of doing things that another man understands.'

They all thought for a while.

'Well,' said Tom Hall, 'supposing we do take up a collection for him, he'd be too damned proud to take it.'

'But that's where we've got the pull on him,' said Mitchell, brightening up. 'I heard Dr Morgan say that Mrs Douglas wouldn't live if she wasn't sent away to a cooler place, and Douglas knows it; and, besides, one of the little girls is sick. We've got him in a corner and he'll have to take the stuff. Besides, two years in jail takes a lot of the pride out of a man.'

'Well, I'm damned if I'll give a sprat to help the man who tried his best to crush the Unions!' said One-eyed Bogan.

'Damned if I will either!' said Barcoo-Rot.

'Now, look here, One-eyed Bogan,' said Mitchell, 'I don't like to harp on old things, for I know they bore you, but when you returned to public life that time no one talked of kicking you out of the town. In fact, I heard that the chaps put a few pounds together to help you get away for a while till you got over your modesty.'

No one spoke.

'I passed Douglas's place on my way here from my camp to-night,' Mitchell went on musingly, 'and I saw him walking up and down in the yard with his sick child in his arms. You remember that little girl, Bogan? I saw her run and pick up your hat and give it to you one day when you were trying to put it on with your feet. You remember, Bogan? The shock nearly sobered you.'

There was a very awkward pause. The position had become too psychological altogether and had to be ended somehow. The awkward silence had to be broken, and Bogan broke it. He turned up Bob Brothers's hat, which was lying on the table, and 'chucked in' a 'quid,' qualify-

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ing the hat and the quid, and disguising his feelings with the national oath of the land.

'We've had enough of this gory, maudlin, sentimental tommy-rot,' he said. 'Here, Barcoo, stump up or I'll belt it out of your hide! I'll—I'll take yer to pieces!'

But Douglas didn't leave the town. He sent his wife and children to Sydney until the heat wave was past, built a new room onto the cottage, and started a book and newspaper shop, and a poultry farm in the back paddock, and flourished.

They called him Mr Douglas for a while, then Douglas, then Percy Douglas, and now he is well-known as Old Daddy Douglas, and the *Sydney Worker*, *Truth*, *Bulletin*, to say nothing of *Reynold's Newspaper* and other democratic and seditious and 'scurrilous' rags are on sale at his shop. He is big with schemes for locking the Darling River, and he gets his drink at O'Donohoo's. He is scarcely yet regarded as a straight-out democrat. He was a gentleman once, Mitchell said, and the old blood was not to be trusted. But, last elections, Douglas worked quietly for Unionism, and gave the leaders certain hints, and put them up to various electioneering dodges which enabled them to return, in the face of Monopoly, a Labour member who is as likely to go straight as long as any other Labour member.

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JACK CORNSTALK

I MET with Jack Cornstalk in London to-day,
He saw me and coo-eed from over the way.
Oh! the solemn-faced Londoners stared with surprise
At his hair and his height as compared with his size;
For his trousers were short and his collar was low,
And—there's not room to coo-ee in London, I know!

But I said to him, 'Jack!' as he gripped my hand fast,
'Oh, I hear that our Country's a nation at last!
I hear they have launched the new ship of the State,
And with men at the wheel who are steering it straight.
I hear 'twas the vote of your Bush mates and you;
And, oh, tell me, Jack Cornstalk, if this can be true?

'I hear that the bitter black strike times are o'er,
And that Grabbitt & Co. shall crush Labour no more;
That Australians are first where Australia was last,
And the day of the foreign adventurer's past;
That all things are coming we fought for so long;
And, oh, tell me, Jack Cornstalk, if I have heard wrong?'

For a moment he dropped the old grin that he wore—
He'd a light in his eyes that was not there before—
And he reached for my hand, which I gave, nothing loth.
And replied in two words, and those words were 'My Oath!'
'They are standing up grand—Toby Barton and See—
And Australia's all right. You can take it from me.'

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THE BLINDNESS OF ONE-EYED BOGAN

'They judge not and they are not judged—'tis their philosophy—
(There's something wrong with every ship that sails upon the sea).'
The Ballad of the Rouseabout.

'AND what became of One-eyed Bogan?' I asked Tom Hall when I met him and Jack Mitchell down in Sydney with their shearing cheques the Christmas before last.

'You'd better ask Mitchell, Harry,' said Tom. 'He can tell you about Bogan better than I can. But first, what about the drink we're going to have?'

We turned up Hunter Street, out of Pitt Street, where a double line of fast electric tramway was running, and the 'bus companies still holding on, and turned into Warby's Hotel, where a counter lunch — as good as many dinners you get for a shilling—was included with a sixpenny drink. 'Get a quiet corner,' said Mitchell, 'I like to hear myself cackle.' So we took our beer out in the fernery and got a cool place at a little table in a quiet corner amongst the fern boxes.

'Well, One-eyed Bogan was a hard case, Mitchell,' I said. 'Wasn't he?'

'Yes,' said Mitchell, putting down his 'long-beer' glass, 'he was.'

'Rather a bad egg?'

'Yes, a regular bad egg,' said Mitchell, decidedly.

'I heard he got caught cheating at cards,' I said.

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'Did you?' said Mitchell. 'Well, I believe he did. Ah, well,' he added reflectively, after another long pull, 'One-eyed Bogan won't cheat at cards any more.'

'Why?' I said. 'Is he dead then?'

'No,' said Mitchell, 'he's blind.'

'Good God!' I said, 'how did that happen?'

'He lost the other eye,' said Mitchell, and he took another drink; 'ah, well, he won't cheat at cards any more —unless there's cards invented for the blind.'

'How did it happen?' I asked,

'Well,' said Mitchell, 'you see, Harry, it was this way. Bogan went pretty free in Bourke after the shearing before last, and in the end he got mixed up in a very ugly-looking business: he was accused of doing two new-chum Jackeroos out of their stuff by some sort of confidence trick.'

'Confidence trick,' I said. 'I'd never have thought that One-eyed Bogan had the brains to go in for that sort of thing.'

'Well, it seems he had, or else he used somebody else's brains; there's plenty of broken-down English gentlemen sharpers knocking about out-back, you know, and Bogan might have been taking lessons from one. I don't know the rights of the case, it was hushed up, as you'll see presently; but anyway, the Jackeroos swore that Bogan had done 'em out of ten quid. They were both Cockneys and I suppose they reckoned themselves smart, but Bush-men have more time to think. Besides, Bogan's one eye was in his favour. You see he always kept his one eye fixed strictly on whatever business he had in hand; if he'd had another eye to rove round and distract his attention and look at things on the outside, the chances are he would never have got into trouble.'

'Never mind that, Jack,' said Tom Hall. 'Harry wants to hear the yarn.'

'Well, to make it short, one of the Jackeroos went to the police and Bogan cleared out. His character was

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pretty bad just then, so there was a piece of blue paper out for him. Bogan didn't seem to think the thing was so serious as it was, for he only went a few miles down the river and camped with his horses on a sort of island inside an anabranch, till the thing should blow over or the new-chums leave Bourke.

'Bogan's old enemy, Constable Campbell, got wind of Bogan's camp, and started out after him. He rode round the outside track and came in onto the river just below where the anabranch joins it, at the lower end of the island and right opposite Bogan's camp. You know what those billabongs are: dry gullies till the river rises from the Queensland rains and backs them up till the water runs round into the river again and makes anabranches of 'em—places that you thought were hollows you'll find above water, and you can row over places you thought were hills. There's no water so treacherous and deceitful as you'll find in some of those billabongs. A man starts to ride across a place where he thinks the water is just over the grass, and blunders into a deep channel—that wasn't there before—with a steady undercurrent with the whole weight of the Darling River funnelled into it; and if he can't swim and his horse isn't used to it—or sometimes if he can swim—it's a case with him, and the Darling River cod hold an inquest on him, if they have time, before he's buried deep in Darling River mud for ever. And somebody advertises in the missing column for Jack Somebody who was last heard of in Australia.'

'Never mind that, Mitchell, go on,' I said.

'Well, Campbell knew the river and saw that there was a stiff current there, so he hailed Bogan.

'"Good day, Campbell," shouted Bogan.

'"I want you, Bogan," said Campbell. "Come across and bring your horses."

'"I'm damned if I will," says Bogan. "I'm not going to catch me death o' cold to save your skin. If you want me

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you'll have to bloody well come and git me." Bogan was a good strong swimmer, and he had good horses, but he didn't try to get away—I suppose he reckoned he'd have to face the music one time or another—and one time is as good as another out-back.

'Campbell was no swimmer; he had no temptation to risk his life—you see it wasn't as in war with a lot of comrades watching ready to advertise a man as a coward for staying alive—so he argued with Bogan and tried to get him to listen to reason, and swore at him. "I'll make it damned hot for you, Bogan," he said, "if I have to come over for you."

'"Two can play at that game," says Bogan.

'"Look here, Bogan," said Campbell, "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you give me your word that you'll come up to the police-station to-morrow I'll go back and say nothing about it. You can say you didn't know a warrant was out after you. It will be all the better for you in the end. Better give me your word, man."

'Perhaps Campbell knew Bogan better than any of us.

'"Now then, Bogan," he said, "don't be a fool. Give your word like a sensible man, and I'll go back. I'll give you five minutes to make up your mind." And he took out his watch.

'But Bogan was nasty and wouldn't give his word, so there was nothing for it but for Campbell to make a try for him.

'Campbell had plenty of pluck, or obstinacy, which amounts to the same thing. He put his carbine and revolver under a log, out of the rain that was coming on, saw to his handcuffs, and then spurred his horse into the water. Bogan lit his pipe with a stick from his camp fire—so Campbell said afterwards—and sat down on his heels and puffed away, and waited for him.

'Just as Campbell's horse floundered into the current Bogan shouted to go back, but Campbell thought it was a

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threat and kept on. But Bogan had caught sight of a log coming down the stream, end on, with a sharp, splintered end, and before Campbell knew where he was, the sharp end of the log caught the horse in the flank. The horse started to plunge and struggle sideways, with all his legs, and Campbell got free of him as quick as he could. Now, you know, in some of those Darling River reaches the current will seem to run steadily for a while, and then come with a rush. (I was caught in one of those rushes once, when I was in swimming, and would have been drowned if I hadn't been born to be hanged.) Well, a rush came along just as Campbell got free from his horse, and he went down stream one side of a snag and his horse the other. Campbell's pretty stout, you know, and his uniform was tight, and it handicapped him.

'Just as he was being washed past the lower end of the snag he caught hold of a branch that stuck out of the water and held on. He swung round and saw Bogan running down to the point opposite him. Now, you know there was always a lot of low cunning about Bogan, and I suppose he reckoned that if he pulled Campbell out he'd stand a good show of getting clear of his trouble; anyway, if he didn't save Campbell it might be said that he killed him—besides, Bogan was a good swimmer, so there wasn't any heroism about it anyhow. Campbell was only a few feet from the bank, but Bogan started to strip—to make the job look as big as possible, I suppose. He shouted to Campbell to say he was coming, and to hold on. Campbell said afterwards that Bogan seemed an hour undressing. The weight of the current was forcing down the bough that Campbell was hanging on to, and suddenly, he said, he felt a great feeling of helplessness take him by the shoulders. He yelled to Bogan and let go.

'Now, it happened that Jake Boreham and I were passing away the time between shearings, and we were having a sort of fishing and shooting loaf down the river in a boat arrange-

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ment that Jake had made out of boards and tarred canvas. We called her the *Jolly Coffin*. We were just poking up the bank in the slack water, a few hundred yards below the Billabong, when Jake said, "Why, there's a horse or something in the river;" then he shouted, "No, by God, it's a man," and we poked the *Coffin* out into the stream for all she was worth. "Looks like two men fighting in the water," Jake shouts presently. "Hurry up, or they'll drown each other."

'We hailed 'em, and Bogan shouted for help. He was treading water and holding Campbell up in front of him now in real professional style. As soon as he heard us he threw up his arms and splashed a bit—I reckoned he was trying to put as much style as he could into that rescue. But I caught a crab, and, before we could get to them, they were washed past into the top of a tree that stood well below flood-mark. I pulled the boat's head round and let her stern down between the branches. Bogan had one arm over a limb and was holding Campbell with the other, and trying to lift him higher out of the water. I noticed Bogan's face was bleeding—there was a dead limb stuck in the tree with nasty sharp points on it, and I reckoned he'd run his face against one of them. Campbell was gasping like a codfish out of water, and he was the whitest man I ever saw (except one, and *he'd* been drowned for a week). Campbell had the sense to keep still. We asked Bogan if he could hold on, and he said he could, but he couldn't hold Campbell any longer. So Jake took the oars and I leaned over the stern and caught hold of Campbell, and Jake ran the boat into the bank, and we got him ashore; then we went back for Bogan and landed him.

'We had some whisky and soon brought Campbell round; but Bogan was bleeding like a pig from a nasty cut over his good eye, so we bound wet handkerchiefs round his eyes and led him to a log and he sat down for a while, holding his hand to his eye and groaning. He kept saying, "I'm

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blind, mates, I'm blind! I've lost me other eye!" but we didn't dream it was so bad as that: we kept giving him whisky. We got some dry boughs and made a big fire. Then Bogan stood up and held his arms stiff down to his sides, opening and shutting his hands as if he was in great pain. And I've often thought since what a different man Bogan seemed without his clothes and with the broken bridge of his nose and his eyes covered by the handkerchiefs. He was clean shaven, and his mouth and chin are his best features, and he's clean limbed and well hung. I often thought afterwards that there was something of a blind god about him as he stood there naked by the fire on the day he saved Campbell's life—something that reminded me of a statue I saw once in the Art Gallery. (Pity the world isn't blinder to a man's worst points.)

'Presently Jake listened and said, "By God, that's lucky!" and we heard a steamer coming up river and presently we saw her coming round the point with a couple of wool-barges in tow. We got Bogan aboard and got some clothes on him, and took him ashore at Bourke to the new hospital. The doctors did all they knew, but Bogan was blind for life. He never saw anything again—except "a sort of dull white blur," as he called it—or his past life sometimes, I suppose. Perhaps he saw that for the first time. Ah, well!

'Bogan's old enemy, Barcoo-Rot, went to see him in the hospital, and Bogan said, "Well, Barcoo, I reckon we've had our last fight. I owe you a hiding, but I don't see how I'm going to pay you." "Never mind that, Bogan, old man," says Barcoo. "I'll take it from anyone yer likes to appoint, if that worries yer; and, look here, Bogan, if I can't fight you I can fight for you—and don't you forget it!" And Barcoo used to lead Bogan round about town in his spare time and tell him all that was going on; and I believe he always had an ear cocked in case someone said a word against Bogan—as if any of the chaps would say a word against a blind man.

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'Bogan's case was hushed up. The police told us to fix it up the best way we could. One of the Jackeroos, who reckoned that Bogan had swindled him, was a gentleman, and he was the first to throw a quid in the Giraffe's hat when it went round for Bogan, but the other Jackeroo was a cur: he said he wanted the money that Bogan had robbed him of. There were two witnesses, but we sent 'em away, and Tom Hall, there, scared the Jackeroo. You know Tom was always the best hand we had at persuading witnesses in Union cases to go home to see their mothers.'

'How did you scare that Jackeroo, Tom?' I asked.

'Tell you about it some other time,' said Tom.

'Well,' said Mitchell, 'Bogan was always a good wool-sorter, so, next shearing, old Baldy Thompson—(you know Baldy Thompson, Harry, of West-o'-Sunday Station)—Baldy had a talk with some of the chaps, and took Bogan out in his buggy with him to West-o'-Sunday. Bogan would sit at the end of the rolling tables, in the shearing shed, with a boy to hand him the fleeces, and he'd feel a fleece and tell the boy what bin to throw it into; and by-and-by he began to learn to throw the fleeces into the bins himself. And sometimes Baldy would have a sheep brought to him and get him to feel the fleece and tell him the quality of it. And then again Baldy would talk, just loud enough for Bogan to overhear, and swear that he'd sooner have Bogan, blind as he was, than half-a-dozen scientific Jackeroos experts with all their eyes about them.

'Of course Bogan wasn't worth anything much to Baldy, but Baldy gave him two pounds a week out of his own pocket, and another quid that we made up between us; so he made enough to pull him through the rest of the year.

'It was curious to see how soon he learned to find his way about the hut and manage his tea and tucker. It was a rough shed, but everybody was eager to steer Bogan about—and, in fact, two of them had a fight about it one day. Baldy and all of us—and especially visitors when

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they came—were mighty interested in Bogan; and I reckon we were rather proud of having a blind wool-sorter. I reckon Bogan had thirty or forty pairs of eyes watching out for him in case he'd run against something or fall. It irritated him to be messed round too much—he said a baby would never learn to walk if it was held all the time. He reckoned he'd learn more in a year than a man who'd served a lifetime to blindness; but we didn't let him wander much—for fear he'd fall into the big rocky water-hole there, by accident.

'And after the shearing season Bogan's wife turned up in Bourke—'

'Bogan's wife!' I exclaimed. 'Why, I never knew Bogan was married.'

'Neither did anyone else,' said Mitchell. 'But he was. Perhaps that was what accounted for Bogan. Sometimes, in his sober moods, I used to have an idea that there must have been something behind the Bogan to account for him. Perhaps he got trapped—or got married and found out that he'd made a mistake—which is about the worst thing a man can find out—'

'Except that his wife made the mistake, Mitchell,' said Tom Hall.

'Or that both did,' reflected Mitchell. 'Ah, well!—never mind—Bogan had been married two or three years. Maybe he got married when he was on the spree—I knew that he used to send money to someone in Sydney and I suppose it was her. Anyway, she turned up after he was blind. She was a hard-looking woman—just the sort that might have kept a third-rate pub or a sly-grog shop. But you can't judge between husband and wife, unless you've lived in the same house with them—and under the same roofs with their parents right back to Adam for that matter. Anyway, she stuck to Bogan all right; she took a little two-roomed cottage and made him comfortable—she's got a sewing-machine and a mangle and takes in washing and

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sewing. She brought a carrotty-headed youngster with her, and the first time I saw Bogan sitting on the verandah with that youngster on his knee I thought it was a good thing that he was blind.'

'Why?' I asked.

'Because the youngster isn't his,' said Mitchell.

'How do you know that?'

'By the look of it—and by the look on her face, once, when she caught me squinting from the kid's face to Bogan's.'

'And whose was it?' I asked, without thinking.

'How am I to know?' said Mitchell. 'It might be yours for all I know—it's ugly enough, and you never had any taste in women. But you mustn't speak of that in Bourke. But there's another youngster coming, and I'll swear that'll be Bogan's all right.

'A curious thing about Bogan is that he's begun to be fidgety about his personal appearance—and you know he wasn't a dood. He wears a collar now, and polishes his boots; he wears elastic sides, and polishes 'em himself—the only thing is that he blackens over the elastic. He can do many things for himself, and he's proud of it. He says he can see many things that he couldn't see when he had his eyes. You seldom hear him swear, save in a friendly way; he seems much gentler, but he reckons he would stand a show with Barcoo-Rot even now, if Barcoo would stand up in front of him and keep yelling—'

'By the way,' I asked, 'how did Bogan lose the sight of his other eye?'

'Sleeping out in the rain when he was drunk,' said Mitchell. 'He got a cold in his eye.' Then he asked, suddenly,—

'Did you ever see a blind man cry?'

'No,' I said.

'Well, I have,' said Mitchell. 'You know Bogan wears goggles to hide his eyes—his wife made him do that. The

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chaps often used to drop round and have a yarn with Bogan and cheer him up, and one evening I was sitting smoking with him, and yarning about old times, when he got very quiet all of a sudden, and I saw a tear drop from under one of his shutters and roll down his cheek. It wasn't the eye he lost saving Campbell—it was the old wall-eye he used to use in the days before he was called "One-eyed Bogan." I suppose he thought it was dark and that I couldn't see his face. (There's a good many people in this world who think you can't see because they can't.) It made me feel like I used to feel sometimes in the days when I felt things—'

'Come on, Mitchell,' said Tom Hall, 'you've had enough beer.'

'I think I have,' said Mitchell. 'Besides, I promised to send a wire to Jake Boreham to tell him that his mother's dead. Jake's shearing at West-o'-Sunday; shearing won't be over for three or four weeks, and Jake wants an excuse to to get away without offending old Baldy and come down and have a fly round with us before the holidays are over.'

Down at the telegraph-office Mitchell took a form and filled it in very carefully:—'Jacob Boreham. West-o'-Sunday Station. Bourke. Come home at once. Mother is dead. In terrible trouble. Father dying.—MARY BOREHAM.'

'I think that will do,' said Mitchell. 'It ought to satisfy Baldy, and it won't give Jake too much of a shock, because he hasn't got a sister or sister-in-law, and his father and mother's been dead over ten years.'

'Now, if I was running a theatre,' said Mitchell, as we left the office, 'I'd give five pounds a night for the face Jake'll have on him when he takes that telegram to Baldy Thompson.'

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'Sacred to the Memory

of

"UNKNOWN"

Who was Found Dead

Near this Tree

During the Great Drought of '86.

(*Don't Cut Down this Tree for a White Man Lies Beneath It.*)'

OH, the wild black swans fly westward still,
While the sun goes down in glory—
And away o'er lonely plain and hill
Still runs the same old story:
The sheoaks sigh it all day long—
It is safe in the Big Scrub's keeping—
'Tis the butcher-birds' and the bell-birds' song
In the gum where 'Unknown' lies sleeping—
(It is heard in the chat of the soldier-birds
O'er the grave where 'Unknown' lies sleeping).

Ah! the Bushmen knew not his name or land,
Or the shame that had sent him here—
But they knew by the shape of the dead man's hand
That his past life lay not near.
The law of the land might have watched for him
Or a sweetheart, wife, or mother;

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But they bared their heads, and their eyes were dim,
For he might have been a brother!
(Ah! the death he died brought him near to them,
For it might have been a brother.)

Oh, the wild black swans to the westward fade,
And the sunset burns to ashes,
And three times bright on an eastern range
The light of a big star flashes,
Like a signal sent to a distant strand
Where a dead man's love sits weeping.
And the night comes grand to the Great Lone Land
O'er the grave where 'Unknown' lies sleeping.
And the big white stars in their clusters blaze
O'er the Bush where 'Unknown' lies sleeping.

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TWO SUNDOWNERS

SHEEP stations in Australia are any distance from twenty to a hundred miles apart, to keep well within the boundaries of truth and the great pastoral country. Shearing at any one shed only lasts a few weeks in the year; the number of men employed is according to the size of the shed—from three to five men in the little bough-covered shed of the small 'cockatoo,' up to 150 or 200 hands all told in the big corrugated iron machine shed of a pastoral company.

Shearing starts early up in northern Queensland, where you can get a 'January shed'; and further south, in February, March or April sheds, and so on down into New South Wales, where shearing often lasts over Christmas. Shearers travel from shed to shed; some go a travel season without getting a pen, and an unlucky shearer might ride or tramp for several seasons and never get hands in wool; and all this explains the existence of the 'footman' with his swag and the horseman with his pack-horse. They have a rough life, and the Australian shearers are certainly the most democratic and perhaps the most independent, intelligent and generous body of workmen in the world.

Shearers at a shed elect their own cook, pay him so much a head, and they buy their rations in the lumps from the station store; and 'travellers,' *i.e.*, shearers and rousabouts travelling for work, are invited, as a matter of course, to sit down to the shearers' table. Also a certain allowance of tea, sugar, flour or meat is still made to travellers at most Western station stores; so it would be

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rather surprising if there weren't some who travelled on the game. The swagman loafer, or 'bummer,' times himself, especially in bad weather, to arrive at the shed just about sundown; he is then sure of 'tea,' shelter for the night, breakfast, and some tucker from the cook to take him on along the track. Brummy and Swampy were sundowners.

Swampy was a bummer born—and proud of it. Brummy had drifted down to loaferdom, and his nature was soured and his spirit revengeful against the world because of the memory of early years wasted at hard work and in being honest. Both were short and stout, and both had scrubby beards, but Brummy's beard was a dusty black and Swampy's fiery red—he indulged in a monkey-shave sometimes, but his lower face was mostly like a patch of coarse stubble with a dying hedge round it. They had travelled together for a long time. They seemed at times to hate each other with a murderous hatred, but they were too lazy to fight. Sometimes they'd tramp side by side and growl at each other by the hour, other times they'd sulk for days; one would push on ahead and the other drop behind until there was a mile or two between them; but one always carried the billy, or the sugar, or something that was necessary to the comfort of the other, so they'd come together at sundown. They had travelled together a long time, and perhaps that was why they hated each other. They often agreed to part and take different tracks, and sometimes they parted—for a while. They agreed in cadging, and cadged in turn. They carried a spare set of tucker-bags, and if, for instance, they were out of sugar and had plenty flour and tea, Brummy or Swampy would go to the store, boundary-rider's hut, or selector's, with the sugar bag in his hand and the other bags in his shirt front on spec. He'd get the sugar first, and then, if it looked good enough, the flour bag would come out, then the tea bag. And before he left he'd remark casually that he and

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his mate hadn't had a smoke for two days. They never missed a chance. And when they'd cadged more tucker than they could comfortably carry, they'd camp for a day or two and eat it down. Sometimes they'd have as much as a pound of tobacco, all in little 'borrowed' bits, cut from the sticks or cakes of honest travellers. They never missed a chance. If a stranger gave Swampy his cake of tobacco with instructions to 'cut off a pipeful,' Swampy would cut off as much as he thought judicious, talking to the stranger and watching his eye all the time, and hiding his palm as much as possible—and sometimes, when he knew he'd cut off more than he could cram into his pipe, he'd put his hand in his pocket for the pipe and drop some of the tobacco there. Then he'd hand the plug to his mate, engage the stranger in conversation and try to hold his eye or detract his attention from Brummy so as to give Brummy a chance of cutting off a couple of pipefuls, and, maybe, nicking off a corner of the cake and slipping it into his pocket. I once heard a Bushman say that no one but a skunk would be guilty of this tobacco trick—that it is about the meanest trick a man could be capable of—*because it spoils the chances of the next hard-up swaggy who asks the victim for tobacco.*

When Brummy and Swampy came to a shed where shearing was in full swing, they'd inquire, first thing, and with some show of anxiety, if there was any chance of gettin' on; if the shed was full-handed they'd growl about hard times, wonder what the country was coming too; talk of their missuses and kids that they'd left in Sydney, curse the squatters and the Government, and, next morning, get a supply of rations from the cook and depart with looks of gloom. If, on the other hand, there was room in the shed for one or both of them, and the boss told them to go to work in the morning, they'd keep it quiet from the cook if possible, and depart, after breakfast, unostentatiously.

Sometimes, at the beginning of a drought, when the tall

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dead grass was like tinder for hundreds of miles and a carelessly-dropped match would set the whole country on fire, Swampy would strike a hard-faced squatter, manager or overseer with a cold eye, and the conversation would be somewhat as follows:

SWAMPY. Good-day, boss!

Boss (*shortly*). 'Day.

SWAMPY. Any chance of a job?

Boss. Naw. Got all I want and we don't start for a fortnight.

SWAMPY. Can I git a bit o' meat?

Boss. Naw! Don't kill till Saturday.

SWAMPY. Pint o' flour?

Boss. Naw! Short ourselves.

SWAMPY. Bit o' tea or sugar, boss?

Boss. Naw—what next?

SWAMPY. Bit o' baccer, boss? Ain't had a smoke for a week.

Boss. Naw. Ain't got enough for meself till the waggon comes out.

SWAMPY. Ah, well! It's hot, ain't it, boss?

Boss. Yes—it's hot.

SWAMPY. Country very dry?

Boss. Yes. Looks like it.

SWAMPY. A fire 'u'd be very bad just now?

Boss. Eh?

SWAMPY. Yes. Now I'm allers very careful with matches an' fire when I'm on the track.

Boss. Are yer?

BRUMMY. Yes. I never lights a fire near the grass—allers in the middle of the track—it's the safest place yer can get. An' I allers puts the fire out afore I leaves the camp. If there ain't no water ter spare I covers the ashes with dirt. An' some fellers are so careless with matches lightin' their pipes. (*Reflective pause.*)

Boss. Are they?'

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SWAMPY. Yes. Now, when I lights me pipe on the track in dry weather I allers rubs the match head up an' drops it in the dust. I never drops a burnin' match. But some travellers is so careless. A chap might light his pipe an' fling the match away without thinkin' an' the match might fall in a dry tuft, an'—there yer are! (*with a wave of his arms*). Hundreds of miles o' grass gone an' thousands o' sheep starvin'. Some fellers is so careless—they never thinks. . . . An' what's more, they don't care if they burn the whole country.

BOSS (*scratching his head reflectively*). Ah—umph!—You can go up to the store and get a bit of tucker. The storekeeper might let yer have a bit o' tobacco.

. . . . . .

On one occasion, when they were out of flour and meat, Brummy and Swampy came across two other pilgrims camped on a creek, who were also out of flour and meat. One of them had tried a surveyors' camp a little further down, but without success. The surveyors' cook had said that he was short of flour and meat himself. Brummy tried him—no luck. Then Swampy said *he'd* go and have a try. As luck would have it, the surveyors' cook was just going to bake; he had got the flour out in the dish, put in the salt and baking powder, mixed it up, and had gone to the creek for a billy of water when Swampy arrived. While the cook was gone Swampy slipped the flour out of the dish into his bag, *wiped* the dish, set it down again, and planted the bag behind a tree at a little distance. Then he stood waiting, holding a spare empty bag in his hand. When the cook came back he glanced at the dish, lowered the billy of water slowly to the ground, scratched his head, and looked at the dish again in a puzzled way.

'Blanked if I didn't think I got that flour out!' he said.

'What's that, mate?' asked Swampy.

'Why! I could have sworn I got the flour out in the

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dish and mixed it before I went for the water,' said the cook, staring at the dish again. 'It's rum what tricks your memory plays on you sometimes.'

'Yes,' said Swampy, showing interest, while the cook got some more flour out into the dish from a bag in the back of the tent. 'It is strange. I've done the same thing meself. I suppose it's the heat that makes us all a bit off at times.'

'Do you cook, then?' asked the surveyors' cook.

'Well, yes. I've done a good bit of it in me time; but its about played out. I'm after stragglers now.' (Stragglers are stray sheep missed in the general muster and found about the out paddocks and shorn after the general shearing.)

They had a yarn and Swampy 'bit the cook's ear' for a 'bit o' meat an' tea an' sugar,' not forgetting 'a handful of flour if yer can spare it.'

'Sorry,' said the cook, 'but I can only let you have about a pint. We're very short ourselves.'

'Oh, that's all right!' said Swampy, as he put the stuff into his spare bags. 'Thank you! Good-day!'

'Good-day,' said the cook.

The cook went on with his work and Swampy departed, catching up the bag of flour from behind the tree as he passed it, and keeping the clump of timber well between him and the surveyors' camp, lest the cook should glance round, and, noticing the increased bulk of his load, get some new ideas concerning mental aberration.

. . . . . .

Nearly every Bushman has at least one superstition, or notion, that lasts his time—as nearly every Bushman has at least one dictionary word which lasts him all his life. Brummy had a gloomy notion—Lord knows how he got it!—that he should 'a' gone on the boards if his people hadn't been so ignorant. He reckoned that he had the face and cut of an actor, could mimic any man's voice, and had

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wonderful control over his features. They came to a notoriously 'hungry' station, where there was a Scottish manager and storekeeper. Brummy went up to 'goverment house' in his own proper person, had a talk with the storekeeper, spoke of a sick mate, and got some flour and meat. They camped down the creek, and next morning Brummy started to shave himself.

'What ever are you a-doin' of, Brummy?' gasped Swampy in great astonishment.

'Wait and see,' growled Brummy, with awful impressiveness, as if he were going to cut Swampy's throat after he'd finished shaving. He shaved off his beard and whiskers, put on a hat and coat belonging to Swampy, changed his voice, dropped his shoulders, and went limping up to the station on a game leg. He saw the cook and got some 'brownie,' a bit of cooked meat and a packet of baking powder. Then he saw the storekeeper and approached the tobacco question. Sandy looked at him and listened with some slight show of interest, then he said,—

'Oh that's all right now! But ye needn't ha' troublt shavin' yer beard—the cold weather's comin' on! An' yer mate's duds don't suit ye—they're too sma'; an' yer game leg doesn't fit ye either—it takes a lot o' practice. Ha' ye got ony tea an' sugar?'

Brummy must have touched something responsive in that old Scot somewhere, but *his* lack of emotion upset Brummy somewhat, or else an old deep-rooted superstition had been severely shaken. Anyway he let Swampy do the cadging for several days thereafter.

. . . . . .

But one bad season they were very hard-up indeed—even for Brummy and Swampy. They'd tramped a long hungry track, and had only met a few wretched Jackeroos, driven out of the cities by hard times, and tramping hopelessly west. They were out of tobacco, and their trousers

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were so hopelessly 'gone' behind that when they went to cadge at a place where there was a woman they were moved to back and sidle and edge away again—and neither Brummy nor Swampy was over-fastidious in matters of dress or personal appearance. It was absolutely necessary to earn a pound or two, so they decided to go to work for a couple of weeks. It wouldn't hurt them, and then there was the novelty of it.

They struck West-o'-Sunday Station, and the boss happened to want a rouseabout to pick up wool and sweep the floor for the shearers.

'I can put *one* of you on,' he said. 'Fix it up between yourselves and go to work in the morning.'

Brummy and Swampy went apart to talk it over.

'Look here! Brum, old man,' said Swampy, with great heartiness, 'we've been mates for a long while now, an' shared an' shared alike. You've allers acted straight to me an' I want to do the fair thing by you. *I* don't want to stand in *your* light. You take the job an' I'll be satisfied with a pair of pants out of it and a bit o' tobacco now an' agen. There yer are! I can't say no fairer than that.'

'Yes,' said Brummy, resentfully, 'an' you'll always be throwin' it up to me afterwards that I done you out of a job!'

'I'll swear I won't,' said Swampy, hurriedly. 'But since you're so blasted touchy and suspicious about it, *you* take this job an' I'll take the next that turns up. How'll that suit you?'

Brummy thought resentfully.

'Look here!' he said presently, 'let's settle it and have done with this damned sentimental tommy-rot. I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll give you the job and take my chance. The boss might want another man to-morrow. Now, are you satisfied?'

But Swampy didn't look grateful or happy.

'Well,' growled Brummy, 'of all the —— I ever travelled

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with you're the ——. What do you want anyway? What'll satisfy you? That's all I want to know. Hey?—can't yer speak?

'Let's toss up for it,' said Swampy, sulkily.

'All right,' said Brummy, with a big oath, and he felt in his pocket for two old pennies he had. But Swampy had got a suspicion somehow that one of those pennies had two heads on it, and he wasn't sure that the other hadn't two tails—also, he suspected Brummy of some skill in 'palming,' so he picked up a chip from the wood-heap, spat on it, and spun it into the air. 'Sing out!' he cried, ''wet or dry?'

'Dry,' said Brummy, promptly. He had a theory that the wet side of the chip, being presumably heaviest, was more likely to fall downwards; but this time it was 'wet' up three times in succession. Brummy ignored Swampy's hand thrown out in hearty congratulation; and next morning he went to work in the shed. Swampy camped down the river, and Brummy supplied him with a cheap pair of moleskin trousers, tucker and tobacco. The shed cut out within three weeks and the two sundowners took the track again, Brummy with two pounds odd in his pocket—he having negotiated his cheque at the shed.

But now there was suspicion, envy and distrust in the hearts of those two wayfarers. Brummy was now a bloated capitalist, and proud, and anxious to get rid of Swampy—at least Swampy thought so. He thought that the least that Brummy might have done was to have shared the 'stuff' with him.

'Look here, Brummy,' he said reproachfully, 'we've shared and shared alike, and—.'

'We never shared money,' said Brummy, decidedly.

'Do you think I want yer blasted money?' retorted Swampy, indignantly. 'When did I ever ask yer for a sprat? Tell me that!'

'You wouldn't have got it if you had asked,' said Brummy,

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uncompromisingly. 'Look here!' with vehemence. 'Didn't I keep yer in tobacco and buy yer gory pants? What are you naggin' about anyway?'

'Well,' said Swampy, 'all I was goin' to say was that yer might let me carry one of them quids in case you lost one—yer know you're careless and lose things; or in case anything happened to you.'

'I ain't going to lose it—if that's all that's fretting you,' said Brummy, 'and there ain't nothing going to happen to me—and don't you forget it.'

'That's all the thanks I get for givin' yer my gory job,' said Swampy, savagely. 'I won't be sich a soft fool agen, I can tell yer.'

Brummy was silent, and Swampy dropped behind. He brooded darkly, and it's a bad thing for a man to brood in the Bush. He was reg'lar disgusted with Brummy. He'd allers acted straight to him, and Brummy had acted like a 'cow.' He'd stand it no longer; but he'd have some satisfaction. He wouldn't be a fool. If Brummy was mean skunk enough to act to a mate like that, Swampy would be even with him; he would wait till Brummy was asleep, collar the stuff, and clear. It was his job, anyway, and the money was his by rights. He'd have his rights.

Brummy, who carried the billy, gave Swampy a long tramp before he camped and made a fire. They had tea in silence, and smoked moodily apart until Brummy turned in. They usually slept on the ground, with a few leaves under them, or on the sand where there was any, each wrapped in his own blankets, and with their spare clothes, or rags rather, for pillows. Presently Swampy turned in and pretended to sleep, but he lay awake watching, and listening to Brummy's breathing. When he thought it was safe he moved cautiously and slipped his hand under Brummy's head, but Brummy's old pocket-book—in which he carried some dirty old letters in a woman's handwriting—was not there. All next day Swampy watched Brummy sharply

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every time he put his hands into his pockets, to try and find out in which pocket he kept his money. Brummy seemed very cheerful and sociable, even considerate, to his mate all day, and Swampy pretended to be happy. They yarned more than they had done for many a day. Brummy was a heavy sleeper, and that night Swampy went over him carefully and felt all his pockets, but without success. Next day Brummy seemed in high spirits—they were nearing Bourke, where they intended to loaf round the pubs for a week or two. On the third night Swampy waited till about midnight, and then searched Brummy, every inch of him he could get at, and tickled him with a straw of grass till he turned over, and ran his hands over the other side of him, and over his feet (Brummy slept with his socks on), and looked in his boots, and in the billy and in the tucker bags, and felt in every tuft of grass round the camp, and under every bush, and down a hollow stump, and up a hollow log: but there was no pocket-book. Brummy couldn't have lost the money and kept it dark—he'd have gone back to look for it at once. Perhaps he'd thrown away the book and sewn the money in his clothes somewhere. Swampy crept back to him and felt the lining of his hat, and was running his hand over Brummy's chest when Brummy suddenly started to snore, and Swampy desisted without loss of time. He crept back to bed, breathing short, and thought hard. It struck him that there was something aggressive about that snore. He began to suspect that Brummy was up to his little game, and it pained him.

Next morning Brummy was decidedly frivolous. At any other time Swampy would have put it down to a 'touch o' the sun,' but now he felt a growing conviction that Brummy knew what he'd been up to the last three nights, and the more he thought of it the more it pained him—till at last he could stand it no longer.

'Look here, Brummy,' he said frankly, 'where the hell

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do you keep that flamin' stuff o' yourn? I been tryin' to git at it ever sense we left West-o'-Sunday.'

'I know you have, Swampy,' said Brummy, affectionately —as if he considered that Swampy had done his best in the interests of mateship.

'I *knowed* yer knowed!' exclaimed Swampy, triumphantly. 'But where the blazes did yer put it?'

'Under *your* head, Swampy, old man,' said Brummy, cheerfully.

Swampy was hurt now. He commented in the language that used to be used by the bullock-punchers of the good days as they pranced up and down by their teams and lammed into the bullocks with saplings and crow-bars, and called on them to lift a heavy load out of a bog in the bed of a muddy creek.

'Never mind, Swampy!' said Brummy, soothingly, as his mate paused and tried to remember worse oaths. 'It wasn't your fault.'

But they parted at Bourke. Swampy had allers acted straight ter Brummy—share 'n' share alike. He'd do as much for a mate as any other man, an' put up with as much from a mate. He had put up with a lot from Brummy: he'd picked him up on the track and learned him all he knowed; Brummy would have starved many a time if it hadn't been for Swampy; Swampy had learned him how to 'battle.' He'd stick to Brummy yet, but he couldn't stand ingratitude. He hated low cunnin' an' suspicion, and when a gory mate got suspicious of his own old mate and wouldn't trust him, an' took to plantin' his crimson money —it was time to leave him.

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A SKETCH OF MATESHIP

BILL and Jim, professional shearers, were coming into Bourke from the Queensland side. They were horsemen and had two pack-horses. At the last camp before Bourke Jim's pack-horse got disgusted and home-sick during the night and started back for the place where he was foaled. Jim was little more than a newchum-Jackeroo; he was no Bushman and generally got lost when he went down the next gully. Bill was a Bushman, so it was decided that he should go back to look for the horse.

Now Bill was going to sell his pack-horse, a well-bred mare, in Bourke, and he was anxious to get her into the yards before the horse sales were over; this was to be the last day of the sales. Jim was the best 'barracker' of the two; he had great imagination; he was a very entertaining story-teller and conversationalist in social life, and a glib and a most impressive liar in business, so it was decided that he should hurry on into Bourke with the mare and sell her for Bill. Seven pounds, reserve.

Next day Bill turned up with the missing horse and saw Jim standing against a verandah post of the 'Carriers' Arms,' with his hat down over his eyes, and thoughtfully spitting in the dust. Bill rode over to him.

'''Ullo, Jim.'

'''Ullo, Bill. I see you got him.'

'Yes, I got him.'

Pause.

'Where'd yer find him?''

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'Bout ten mile back. Near Ford's Bridge. He was just feedin' along.'

Pause. Jim shifted his feet and spat in the dust.

'Well,' said Bill at last. 'How did you get on, Jim?'

'Oh, all right,' said Jim. 'I sold the mare.'

'That's right,' said Bill. 'How much did she fetch?'

'Eight quid;' then, rousing himself a little and showing some emotion, 'An' I could 'a' got ten quid for her if I hadn't been a dam' fool.'

'Oh, that's good enough,' said Bill.

'I could 'a' got ten quid if I'd 'a' waited.'

'Well, it's no use cryin'. Eight quid is good enough. Did you get the stuff?'

'Oh, yes. They parted all right. If I hadn't been such a dam' fool an' rushed it, there was a feller that would 'a' given ten quid for that mare.'

'Well, don't break yer back about it,' said Bill. 'Eight is good enough.'

'Yes. But I could 'a' got ten,' said Bill, languidly, putting his hand in his pocket.

Pause. Bill sat waiting for him to hand over the money; but Jim withdrew his hand empty, stretched, and said,—

'Ah, well, Bill, I done it in. Lend us a couple o' notes.'

Jim had been drinking and gambling all night and he'd lost the eight pounds as well as his own money.

Bill didn't explode. What was the use? He should have known that Jim wasn't to be trusted with money in town. It was he who had been the fool. He sighed and lent Jim a pound, and they went in to have a drink.

Now it strikes me that if this had happened in a civilised country (like England) Bill would have had Jim arrested and jailed for larceny as a baillie, or embezzlement, or whatever it was. And would Bill or Jim or the world have been any better for it?

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ON THE TUCKER TRACK

A STEELMAN STORY

STEELMAN and Smith, professional wanderers from New Zealand, took a run over to Australia one year to have a look at the country, and drifted out-back, and played cards and 'headin-'em' at the shearing sheds (while pretending to be strangers to each other), and sold eye-water and unpatented medicine, and worked the tucker tracks. They struck a streak of bad luck at West-o'-Sunday Station, where they were advised (by the boss and about fifty excited shearers) to go east, and not to stop till they reached the coast. They were tramping along the track towards Bourke; they were very hard-up and had to 'battle' for tucker and tobacco along the track. They came to a lonely shanty, about two camps west of Bourke.

'We'll turn off into the scrub and strike the track the other side of the shanty and come back to it,' said Steelman. 'You see, if they see us coming into Bourke they'll say to themselves, "Oh, we're never likely to see these chaps again," and they won't give us anything, or, perhaps, only a pinch of tea or sugar in a big lump of paper. There's some women that can never see a tucker-bag, even if you hold it right under their noses. But if they see us going out-back they'll reckon that we'll get a shed likely as not, and we'll be sure to call there with

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our cheques coming back. I hope the old man's got the lumbago, or sciatica, or something.'

'Why?' asked Smith.

'Because whenever I see an old man poking round the place on a stick I always make for him straight and inquire about his trouble; and no matter what complaint he's got, my old man suffered from it for years. It's pretty hard graft listening to an old man with a pet leg, but I find it pays; and I always finish up by advising him to try St Jacob's Oil. Perhaps he's been trying it for years, but that doesn't matter; the consultation works out all right all the same, and there's never been a remedy tried yet but I've got another.

'I've got a lot of Maori and blackfellow remedies in my mind, and when they fail I can fall back on the Chinese; and if that isn't enough I've got a list of my grandmother's remedies that she wrote down for me when I was leaving home, and I kept it for a curiosity. It took her three days to write them, and I reckon they'll fill the bill.

'You don't want a shave. You look better with that stubble on. You needn't say anything; just stand by and wear your usual expression, and if they ask me what's the matter with my mate I'll fix up a disease for you to have, and get something extra on your account, poor beggar!

'I wish we had a chap with us that could sing a bit and run the gamut on a fiddle or something. With a sickly-looking fish like you to stand by and look interesting and die slowly of consumption all the time, and me to do the talking, we'd be able to travel from one end of the Bush to the other and live on the fat of the land. I wouldn't cure you for a hundred pounds.'

They reached the shanty, and there, sure enough, was an old man pottering round with a list to starboard. He was working with a hoe inside a low paling fence round a

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sort of garden. Steelman and Smith stopped outside the fence.

'Good-day, boss!'

''Day.'

'It's hot.'

'It's hot.'

So far it was satisfactory.

He was a little man, with a wiry, red beard. He might have been a Scandinavian.

'You seem to be a bit lame,' said Steelman. 'Hurt your foot?'

'Naw,' said the old man. 'It's an old thing.'

'Ah!' said Steelman, 'lumbago, I suppose? My father suffered cruel from it for years.'

'Naw,' said the old man, moving closer to the fence. 'It ain't in me back; the trouble's with me leg.'

'Oh!' said Steelman. 'One a bit shorter than the other?'

'Well, yes. It seems to be wearin' a bit shorter. I must see to it.'

'Hip disease, perhaps?' said Steelman. 'A brother o' mine had—'

'Naw, it's not in the hip,' said the old man. 'My leg's gone at the knee.'

'Oh! stiff joint; I know what that is. Had a touch of it once myself. An uncle of mine was nearly crippled with it. He used to use St Jacob's Oil. Ever try St Jacob's Oil?'

'Naw,' said the old man, 'not that I know of. I've used linseed oil though.'

'Linseed oil!' said Steelman; 'I never heard of that for stiff knee. How do you use it?'

'Use it raw,' said the old man. 'Raw linseed oil; I've rubbed it in, and I've soaked me leg in it.'

'Soaked your leg in it!' said Steelman. 'And did it do it any good?'

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'Well, it seems to preserve it—keeps it from warping, and it wears better—and it makes it heavier. It seemed a bit too light before.'

Steelman nudged Smith under cover of the palings. The old man was evidently a bit ratty.

'Well, I hope your leg will soon be all right, boss,' said Steelman.

'Thank you,' said the old man, 'but I don't think there's much hope. I suppose you want some tucker?'

'Well, yes,' said Steelman, rather taken aback by the old man's sudden way of putting it. 'We're hard up.'

'Well, come along to the house and I'll see if I can get yer something,' said the old man; and they walked along outside the fence, and he bobbed along inside, till he came to a little gate at the corner. He opened the gate and stumped out. He had a wooden leg. He wore his trouser leg down over it, and the palings had hidden the bottom from Steelman and Smith.

He wanted them to stay to dinner, but Steelman didn't feel comfortable, and thanked him, and said they'd rather be getting on (Steelman always spoke for Smith); so the old man gave them some cooked meat, bread, and a supply of tea and sugar. Steelman watched his face very close, but he never moved a muscle. But when they looked back he was leaning on his hoe, and seemed to be shaking.

'Took you back a bit, Steely, didn't it?' suggested Smith.

'How do you make that out?' snorted Steelman, turning on him suddenly. 'I knew a carpenter who used to soak his planes in raw linseed oil to preserve them and give them weight. There's nothing funny about that.'

Smith rubbed his head.

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THE BULLETIN HOTEL

I WAS drifting in the drizzle past the Cecil in the Strand—
Which, I'm told, is very toney—and its front looks very grand;
And I somehow fell a-thinking of a pub. I know so well,
Of a palace in Australia called The Bulletin Hotel.

Just a little six-room'd shanty built of corrugated tin,
And all round a blazing desert—land of camels, thirst and sin;
And the landlord is 'the Spider'—Western diggers know him well—
Charlie Webb!—Ah, there you have it!—of the Bulletin Hotel.

'Tis a big soft-hearted spider in a land where life is grim,
And a web of great good-nature that brings worn-out flies to him:
'Tis the club of many lost souls in the wide Westralian hell,
And the stage of many Mitchells is the Bulletin Hotel.

But the swagman, on his uppers, pulls an undertaker's mug,
And he leans across the counter and he breathes in Charlie's lug—
Tale of thirst and of misfortune. Charlie knows it, and—ah, well!—
But it's very bad for business at the Bulletin Hotel.

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'What's a drink or two?' says Charlie, 'and you can't refuse a feed;'
But there's many a drink unpaid for, many sticks of 'borrowed' weed;
And the poor old spineless bummer and the broken-hearted swell
Know that they are sure of tucker at the Bulletin Hotel.

There's the liquor and the licence and the 'carriage' and the rent,
And the sea or grave 'twixt Charlie and the fivers he has lent;
And I'm forced to think in sorrow, for I know the country well,
That the end will be the bailiff in the Bulletin Hotel.

But he'll pack up in a hurry and he'll seek a cooler clime,
If I make a rise in England and I get out there in time.
For a mate o' mine is Charlie and I stayed there for a spell,
And I owe more than a jingle to the Bulletin Hotel.

But there's lots of graft between us, there are many miles of sea,
So, if you should drop on Charlie, just shake hands with him for me;
Say I think the Bush less lonely than the great town where I dwell,
And—a grander than the Cecil is the Bulletin Hotel.

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A BUSH PUBLICAN'S LAMENT

'. . . For thirst is long and throats is short
Among the sons o' men.'

M. J. C.

I WISH I was spifflicated before I ever seen a pub!

You see, it's this way. Suppose a cove comes along on a blazin' hot day in the drought—an' *you* ought to know how hell-hot it can be out here—an' he dumps his swag in the corner of the bar; an' he turns round an' he ses ter me, 'Look here, boss, I ain't got a lonely steever on me, an' God knows when I'll git one. I've tramped ten mile this mornin', an' I'll have ter tramp another ten afore to-night. I'm expectin' ter git on shearin' with ol' Baldy Thompson at West-o'-Sunday nex' week. I got a thirst on me like a sunstruck bone, an', for God sake, put up[1] a couple o' beers for me an' my mate, an' I'll fix it up with yer when I come back after shearin'.'

An' what's a feller ter do? I bin there meself, an'—I put it to you! I've known what it is to have a thirst on me.

An' suppose a poor devil comes along in the jim-jams, with every inch on him jumpin' an' a look in his eyes like a man bein' murdered an' sent ter hell, an' a whine in his voice like a whipped cur, an' the snakes a-chasing of him; an' he hooks me with his finger ter the far end o' the bar—as if he was goin' ter tell me that the world was ended—an' he hangs over the bar an' chews me lug, an' tries to speak, an' breaks off inter a sort o' low shriek, like a terrified woman,

[1] 'Put up'—Put it on the slate.

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an' he says, 'For Mother o' Christ's sake, giv' me a drink!' An' what am I to do? I bin there meself. I knows what the horrors is. He mighter blued his cheque at the last shanty. But what am I ter do? I put it ter you. If I let him go he might hang hisself ter the nex' leanin' tree.

What's a drink? yer might arst—I don't mind a drink or two; but when it comes to half a dozen in a day it mounts up, I can tell yer. Drinks is sixpence here—I have to pay for it, an' pay carriage on it. It's all up ter me in the end. I used sometimes ter think it was lucky I wasn't west o' the sixpenny line, where I'd lose a shillin' on every drink I give away.

An' supposen a sundowner comes along smokin' tea-leaves, an' ses ter me, 'Look here, boss! me an' my mate ain't had a smoke for three days!' What's a man ter do? I put it ter you! I'm a heavy smoker meself, an' I've known what it is to be without a smoke on the track. But 'nail-rod' is ninepence a stick out here, an' I have ter pay carriage. It all mounts up, I can tell yer.

An' supposin Ole King Billy an' his ole black gin comes round at holiday time and squats on the verander, an' blarneys an' wheedles and whines and argues like a hundred Jews an' ole Irishwomen put tergether, an' accuses me o' takin' his blarsted country from him, an' makes me an' the missus laugh; an' we gives him a bottl'er rum an' a bag or grub ter get rid of him an' his rotten ole scare-crow tribe— It all tells up. I was allers soft on the blacks, an', beside, a ole gin nursed me an' me mother when I was born, an' saved me blessed life—not that that mounts to much. But it all tells up, an' I got me licence ter pay. An' some bloody skunk goes an' informs on me for supplyin' the haboriginalls with intossicatin' liquor, an' I have ter pay a fine an' risk me licence. But what's a man ter do?

An' three or four herrin'-gutted Jackeroos comes along about dinner-time, when the table's set and the cookin' smellin' from the kitchin, with their belts done up three

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holes, an' not the price of a feed on 'em. What's a man ter do? I've known what it is ter do a perish on the track meself. It's not the tucker I think on. I don't care a damn for that. When the shearers come every one is free to go inter the kitchin an' forage for hisself when he feels hungry—so long as he pays for his drink. But the Jackeroos can't pay for drinks, an' I have ter pay carriage on the flour an' tea an' sugar an' groceries—an' it all tells up by the end o' the year.

An' a straight chap that knows me gets a job to take a flock o' sheep or a mob o' cattle ter the bloomin' Gulf, or South Australia, or somewheers—an' loses one of his horses goin' out ter take charge, an' borrers eight quid from me ter buy another. He'll turn up agen in a year or two an' most likely want ter make me take twenty quid for that eight —an' make everybody about the place blind drunk—but I've got ter wait, an' the wine an' sperit merchants an' the brewery won't. They know I can't do without liquor in the place.

An' lars' rains Jimmy Nowlett, the bullick-driver, gets bogged over his axle-trees back there on the Blacksoil Plains between two flooded billerbongs, an' prays till the country steams an' his soul's busted, an' his throat like a lime-kiln. He taps a keg o' rum or beer ter keep his throat in workin' order. I don't mind that at all, but him an' his mates git flood-bound for near a week, an' broach more kegs, an' go on a howlin' spree in ther mud, an' spill mor'n they swipe, an' leave a tarpaulin off a load, an' the flour gets wet, an' the sugar runs out of the bags like syrup, an'— What's a feller ter do? Do yer expect me to set the law onter Jimmy? I've knowed him all my life, an' he knowed my father afore I was born. He's been on the roads this forty year, till he's as thin as a rat, and as poor as myall black; an' he's got a family ter keep back there in Bourke. No, I have ter pay for it in the end, an' it all mounts up, I can tell yer.

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An' suppose some poor devil of a newchum black-sheep comes along, staggerin' from one side of the track to the other, and spoutin' poetry; dyin' o' heat or fever, or heart-break an' home-sickness, or a life o' disserpation he'd led in England, an' without a sprat on him, an' no claim on the Bush; an' I ketches him in me arms as he stumbles inter the bar, an' he wants me ter hold him up while he turns English inter Greek for me. An' I put him ter bed, an' he gits worse, an' I have ter send the buggy twenty mile for a doctor—an' pay him. An' the Jackeroo gits worse, an' has ter be watched an' nursed an' held down sometimes; an' he raves about his home an' mother in England, an' the blarsted university that he was eddicated at—an' a woman —an' somethin' that sounds like potery in French; an' he upsets my missus a lot, an' makes her blubber. An' he dies, an' I have ter pay a man ter bury him (an' knock up a sort o' fence round the grave arterwards ter keep the stock out), an' send the buggy agen for a parson, an'— Well, what's a man ter do? I couldn't let him wander away an' die like a dog in the scrub, an' be shoved under-ground like a dog, too, if his body was ever found. The Government might pay ter bury him, but there ain't never been a pauper funeral from my house yet, an' there won't be one if I can help it—except it be meself.

An' then there's the bother goin' through his papers to try an' find out who he was an' where his friends is. An' I have ter get the missus to write a letter to his people, an' we have ter make up lies about how he died ter make it easier for 'em. An' goin' through his letters, the missus comes across a portrait an' a locket of hair, an' letters from his mother an' sisters an' girl; an' they upset her, an' she blubbers agin, an' gits sentimental—like she use ter long ago when we was first married.

There was one bit of poetry—I forgit it now—that that there Jackeroo kep' sayin' over an' over agen till it buzzed in me head; an', weeks after, I'd ketch the missus mutterin'

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it to herself in the kitchen till I thought she was goin' ratty.

An' we gets a letter from the Jackeroo's friends that puts us to a lot more bother. I hate havin' anythin' to do with letters. An' someone's sure to say he was lambed down an' cleaned out an' poisoned with bad Bush liquor at my place. It's almost enough ter make a man wish there *was* a recordin' angel.

An' what's the end of it? I got the blazin' bailiff in the place now! I can't shot him out because he's a decent, hard-up, poor devil from Bourke, with consumption or somethin', an' he's been talkin' to the missus about his missus an' kids; an' I see no chance of gittin' rid of him, unless the shearers come along with their cheques from West-o'-Sunday nex' week and act straight by me. Like as not I'll have ter roll up me swag an' take the track meself in the end. They say publicans are damned, an' I think so, too; an' I wish I'd bin operated on before ever I seen a pub.

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THE BALLAD OF THE ROUSE-ABOUT

(A Song about Ourselves)

A ROUSEABOUT of rouseabouts, from any land—or none—
I bear a nickname of the Bush, and I'm—a woman's son;
I came from where I camp'd last night, and, at the day-dawn glow,
I rub the darkness from my eyes, roll up my swag, and go.

Some take the track for bitter pride, some for no pride at all—
(But—to us all the world is wide when driven to the wall)
Some take the track for gain in life, some take the track for loss—
And some of us take up the swag as Christ took up the Cross.

Some take the track for faith in men—some take the track for doubt—
Some flee a squalid home to work their own salvation out.
Some dared not see a mother's tears or meet a father's face—
Born of good Christian families some leap, head-long, from Grace.

Oh, we are men who fought and rose, or fell from many grades;
Some born to lie, and some to pray, we're men of many trades;

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We're men whose fathers were and are of high and low degree—
The sea was open to us and we sailed across the sea.

And—were our quarrels wrong or just?—has no place in my song—
We seared our souls in puzzling as to what was right or wrong;
We judge not and we are not judged—'tis our philosophy—
There's something wrong with every ship that sails upon the sea.

From shearing shed to shearing shed we tramp to make a cheque—
Jack Cornstalk and the ne'er-do-weel—the tar-boy and the wreck.
We learn the worth of man to man—and this we learn too well—
The shanty and the shearing shed are warmer spots in hell!

I've humped my swag to Bawley Plain, and further out and on;
I've boiled my billy by the Gulf, and boiled it by the Swan—
I've thirsted in dry lignum swamps, and thirsted on the sand,
And eked the fire with camel dung in Never-Never Land.

I know the track from Spencer's Gulf and north of Cooper's Creek—
Where falls the half-caste to the strong, 'black velvet' to the weak—
(From gold-top Flossie in the Strand to half-caste and the gin—
If they had brains, poor animals! we'd teach them how to sin.)

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I've tramped, and camped, and 'shore' and drunk with many mates Out Back—
And every one to me is Jack because the first was Jack—
A 'lifer' sneaked from jail at home—the 'straightest' mate I met—
A 'ratty' Russian Nihilist—a British Baronet!

I know the tucker tracks that feed—or leave one in the lurch—
The 'Burgoo' (Presbyterian) track—the 'Murphy' (Roman Church)—
But more the *man*, and not the *track*, so much as it appears,
For 'battling' is a trade to learn, and I've served seven years.

We're haunted by the past at times—and this is very bad,
And so we drink till horrors come, lest, sober, we go mad—
So much is lost Out Back, so much of hell is realised—
A man might skin himself alive and no one be surprised.

A rouseabout of rouseabouts, above—beneath regard,
I know how soft is this old world, and I have learnt how hard—
A rouseabout of rouseabouts—I know what men can feel,
I've seen the tears from hard eyes slip as drops from polished steel.

I learned what college had to teach, and in the school of men
By camp-fires I have learned, or, say, unlearned it all again;
But this I've learned, that truth is strong, and if a man go straight
He'll live to see his enemy struck down by time and fate!

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We hold him true who's true to one, however false he be
(There's something wrong with every ship that lies beside the quay);
We lend and borrow, laugh and joke, and when the past is drowned,
We sit upon our swags and smoke and watch the world go round.

(*From* 'Verses Popular and Otherwise.'—ANGUS & ROBERTSON, Sydney.)

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THE SHEARER'S DREAM

MITCHELL and I rolled up our swags after New Year and started to tramp west. It had been a very bad season after a long drought. Old Baldy Thompson had only shorn a few bales of grass seed and burs, so he said, and thought of taking the track himself; but we hoped to get on shearing stragglers at West-o'-Sunday or one of the stations of the Hungerford track.

It was very hot weather, so we started after sunset, intending to travel all night. We crossed the big billabong, and were ploughing through the dust and sand towards West Bourke, when a buggy full of city girls and swells passed by. They were part of a theatrical company on tour in the Back-Blocks, and some local Johnnies. They'd been driven out to see an artesian bore, or wool-shed, or something. The horses swerved, and jerked a little squawk out of one of the girls. Then another said,—

'Ow-w! Two old swaggies. He! he! he!'

I glanced at Mitchell to see if he was hit, and caught his head down; but he pulled himself up and pretended to hitch his swag into an easier position.

About a hundred yards further on he gave me a side look and said,—

'Did that touch you, Harry?'

'No,' I said, and I laughed.

'You see,' reflected Mitchell, 'they're more to be pitied

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than blamed. It's their ignorance. In the first place, we're not two old tramps, as they think. We are professional shearers; and the Australian shearers are about the most independent and intelligent class of men in the world. We've got more genius in one of our little fingers than there is in the whole of that waggonette-load of diddle-daddle and fiddle-faddle and giggles. Their intellects are on a level with the rotten dramas they travel with, and their lives about as false. They are slaves to the public, and their home is the pub-parlour, with sickly, senseless Johnnies to shout suppers and drink for them and lend their men money. If one of those girls is above the average, how she must despise those Johnnies—and the life! She must feel a greater contempt for them than the private-barmaid does for the boozer she cleans out. He gets his drink and some enjoyment, anyhow. And how she must loathe the life she leads! And what's the end of it as often as not? I remember once, when I was a boy, I was walking out with two aunts of mine—they're both dead now. God rest their fussy, innocent old souls!—and one of 'em said suddenly, "Look! Quick, Jack! There's Maggie So-and-So, the great actress." And I looked and saw a woman training vines in a porch. It seemed like seeing an angel to me, and I never forgot her as she was then. The diggers used to go miles out of town to meet the coach that brought her, and take the horses out and drag it in, and throw gold in her lap, and worship her.

'The last time I was in Sydney I saw her sitting in the back-parlour of a third-rate pub. She was dying of dropsy and couldn't move from her chair. She showed me a portrait of herself as I remembered her, and talked quite seriously about going on the stage again.

'Now, our home is about two thousand miles wide, and the world's our stage. If the worst comes to the worst we can always get tucker and wood and water for nothing. If we're camping at a job in a tent there's no house-

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cleaning to bother us. All we've got to do when the camp gets too dirty is to shift the tent to a fresh place. We've got time to think and—we're free.

'But then, agen,' he reflected, 'there's the world's point of view to be considered. Some day I might be flashing past in a buggy or saloon-carriage—or, the chances are it will be you—and you might look out the window and see an old swaggy tramping along in the dust, or camped under a strip of calico in the rain in the scrub. (And it might be me—old Mitchell—that really wrote your books, only the world won't know it.) And then you'll realise what a wretched, miserable life it was. We never realise the miseries of life till we look back—the mistakes and miseries that had to be and couldn't be helped. It's all luck—luck and chance.'

But those girls seemed to have gravelled Mitchell, and he didn't seem able to talk himself round. He tramped on, brooding for a while, and then suddenly he said,—

'Look here, Harry! Those girls are giving a dance to-night, and if I liked to go back to Bourke and tog up and go to the dance I could pick out the prettiest, dance with her all the evening, and take her for a stroll afterwards, old tramp as they thought me. I've lived—But it wouldn't be worth my while now.'

I'd seen Jack in a mood like this before, and thought it best to say nothing. Perhaps the terrible heat had affected him a little. We walked on in silence until we came to the next billabong. 'Best boil the billy here, Harry,' said Mitchell, 'and have some tea before we go any further.'

I got some sticks together and made a fire and put the billy on. The country looked wretched—like the ghost of a burnt-out land—in the moonlight. The banks of the creek were like ashes, the thin, gnarled gum-bush seemed dry-rotting fast, and in many places the surface of the ground was cracked in squares where it had shrunk

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in the drought. In the bed of the creek was a narrow gutter of water that looked like bad milk.

Mitchell sat on his swag, with his pint of tea on the ground by his foot, and chewed his pipe.

'What's up, Jack?' I asked. 'Have you got the blues?'

'Well, yes, Harry,' he said. 'I'm generally dull the first day on the track. The first day is generally the worst, anywhere or anytime — except, perhaps, when you're married. . . . I got— Well, I got thinking of the time when a woman's word could have hurt me.'

Just then one of the 'travellers' who were camped a bit up the creek suddenly commenced to sing. It was a song called 'The Shearer's Dream,' and I suppose the buggy of girls, or the conversation they started, reminded him of it. He started his verses and most of his lines with a howl; and there were unexpected howls all through the song, and it wailed off, just as unexpectedly, in places where there was no pathos that I could see:—

'Oh, I dreamt I shore in a shearer's shed, and it was a dream of joy,
For every one of the rouseabouts was a girl dressed up as a boy—
Dressed up like a page in a pantomime, and the prettiest ever seen—
They had flaxen hair, they had coal-black hair — and every shade between.'

'Every' with sudden and great energy, a long drop on to 'shade,' and a wail of intense sadness and regret running on into 'between,' the dirge reaching its wailsomest in the 'tween' in every case.

'The shed was cooled by electric fans that was over every "shoot";
The pens was of polished ma-ho-gany, and ev'rything else to suit;
The huts was fixed with spring-mattresses, and the tucker was simply grand,
And every night by the biller-bong we darnced to a German band.'

'*Chorus, boys!*'

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'There was short, plump girls, there was tall, slim girls, and the handsomest ever seen—
They was four-foot-five, they was six-foot high, and hevery size between.

Our pay was the wool on the jumbucks' backs, so we shore till all was blue—
The sheep was washed afore they was shore (and the rams was scented too);
And we all of us cried when the shed cut out, in spite of the long, hot days,
For hevery hour them girls waltzed in with whisky and beer on tr-a-a-a-ys!'

'*Chorus! you* ——!'

'They had kind grey eyes, they had coal-black eyes, and the grandest ever seen—
They had plump pink hands, they had slim white hands, and hevery shape be-tw-e-e-n.

'There was three of them girls to every chap, and as jealous as they could be—'

'Ow! you ——'

The singer's voice or memory seemed suddenly to have failed him at this point, but whether his mates hit him on the back of the head with a tomahawk, or only choked him, I do not know. Mitchell was inclined to think, from the sound of it, that they choked him.

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THE LOST SOULS' HOTEL

HUNGERFORD ROAD, February. One hundred and thirty miles of heavy reddish sand, bordered by dry, hot scrubs. Dense cloud of hot dust. Four wool-teams passing through a gate in a 'rabbit proof' fence which crosses the road. Clock, clock, clock of wheels and rattle and clink of chains, etc., crack of whips and explosions of Australian language. Bales and everything else coated with dust. Stink of old axle-grease and tarpaulins. Tyres hot enough to fry chops on: bows and chains so hot that it's a wonder they do not burn through the bullocks' hides. Water lukewarm in blistered kegs slung behind the waggons. Bullocks dragging along as only bullocks do. Wheels ploughing through the deep sand, and the load lurching from side to side. Half-way on a 'dry-stretch' of seventeen miles. Big 'tank' full of good water through the scrub to the right, but it is a private tank and a boundary rider is shepherding it. Mulga scrub and sparse, spiky under-growth.

The carriers camp for dinner and boil their billies while the bullocks droop under their yokes in the blazing heat; one or two lie down and the leaders drag and twist themselves round under a dead tree, under the impression that there is shade there. The carriers look like Red Indians, with the masks of red dust 'bound' with sweat on their faces, but there is an unhealthy-looking, whitish space round their eyes, caused by wiping away the blinding dust, sweat and flies. The dry sticks burn with a pale

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flame and an almost invisible thin pale blue smoke. The sun's heat dancing and dazzling across every white fence-post, sand-hill, or light-coloured object in the distance.

One man takes off his boot and sock, empties half a pint of sand out of them, and pulls up his trouser leg. His leg is sheathed to the knee in dust and sweat; he absently scrape it with his knife, and presently he amuses himself by moistening a strip with his fore-finger and shaving it, as if he were vaguely curious to see if he is still a white man.

The Hungerford coach ploughs past in a dense cloud of dust.

The teams drag on again like a 'wounded snake that dies at sundown,' if a wounded snake that dies at sundown could revive sufficiently next morning to drag on again until another sun goes down.

Hopeless-looking swagmen are met with during the afternoon, and one carrier—he of the sanded leg—lends them tobacco: his mates contribute 'bits o'' tea, flour and sugar.

Sundown and the bullocks done up. The teamsters unyoke them and drive them on to the next water—five miles—having previously sent a mate to reconnoitre and see that boundary rider is not round, otherwise, to make terms with him, for it is a squatters' bore. They hurry the bullocks down to the water and back in the twilight, and then, under cover of darkness, turn them into a clearing in the scrub off the road, where a sign of grass might be seen—if you look close. But the 'bullockies' are better off than the horse-teamsters, for bad chaff is sold by the pound and corn is worth its weight in gold.

. . . . . .

Mitchell and I turned off the track at the rabbit-proof fence and made for the tank in the mulga. We boiled the billy and had some salt mutton and damper. We were making back for Bourke, having failed to get a cut in any of the sheds on the Hungerford track. We sat under a clump of mulga saplings, with our backs to the trunks, and

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got out our pipes. Usually, when the flies were very bad on the track, we had to keep twigs or wild-turkey-tail feathers going in front of our faces the whole time to keep the mad flies out of our eyes; and, when we camped, one would keep the feather going while the other lit his pipe—then the smoke would keep them away. But the flies weren't so bad in a good shade or in the darkened hut. Mitchell's pipe would have smoked out Old Nick; it was an ancient string-bound meerschaum, and strong enough to kill a blackfellow. I had one smoke out of it, once when I felt bad in my inside and wanted to be sick, and the result was very satisfactory.

Mitchell looked through his old pocket-book—more by force of habit than anything else—and turned up a circular from Tattersall's. And that reminded him.

'Do you know what I'd do, Harry,' he said, 'if I won Tattersall's big sweep, or was to come into fifty or a hundred thousand pounds, or, better still, a million?'

'Nothing, I suppose,' I said, 'except to get away to Sydney or some cooler place than this.'

'I'll tell you what I'd do,' said Mitchell, talking round his pipe. 'I'd build a Swagman's Rest right here.'

'A Swagman's Rest?'

'Yes. Right here on this very God-forsaken spot. I'd build a Swagman's Rest and call it the Lost Souls' Hotel, or the Sundowners' Arms, or the Half-way House to ——, or some such name that would take the Bushmen's fancy. I'd have it built on the best plans for coolness in a hot country; bricks, and plenty of wide verandahs with brick floors, and balconies, and shingles, in the old Australian style. I wouldn't have a sheet of corrugated iron about the place. And I'd have old-fashioned hinged sashes with small panes and vines round 'em; they look cooler and more homely and romantic than the glaring sort that shove up.

'And I'd dig a tank or reservoir for surface water as big

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as a lake, and bore for artesian water—and get it, too, if I had to bore right through to England; and I'd irrigate the ground and make it grow horse-feed and fruit, and vegetables too, if I had to cart manure from Bourke. And every teamster's bullock or horse, and every shearer's hack, could burst itself free, but I'd make travelling stock pay—for it belongs to the squatters and capitalists. All carriers could camp for one night only. And I'd—no, I wouldn't have any flowers; they might remind some heart-broken, newchum black-sheep of the house where he was born, and the mother whose heart he broke—and the father whose grey hairs he brought down in sorrow to the grave—and break him up altogether.'

'But what about the old-fashioned windows and the vines?' I asked.

'Oh!' said Mitchell, 'I forgot them. On second thought I think I *would* have some flowers; and maybe a bit of ivy-green. The newchum might be trying to work out his own salvation, and the sight of the roses and ivy would show him that he hadn't struck such a God-forgotten country after all, and help strengthen the hope for something better that's in the heart of every vagabond till he dies.'

Puff, puff, puff, slowly and reflectively.

'Until he dies,' repeated Mitchell. 'And, maybe,' he said, rousing himself, 'I'd have a little room fixed up like a corner of a swell restaurant, with silver and napkins on the table, and I'd fix up a waiter, so that when a broken-down University wreck came along he might feel, for an hour or so, something like the man he used to be. But I suppose,' Mitchell reflected, 'he wouldn't feel completely his old self without a lady friend sitting opposite to him. I might fix up a black gin for him, but I suppose he'd draw the colour line. But that's nonsense.

'All teamsters and travellers could camp there for one night only. I'd have shower-baths; but I wouldn't force

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any man to have a bath against his will. They could sit down to a table and have a feed off a table-cloth, and sleep in sheets, and feel like they did before their old mothers died, or before they ran away from home.'

'Who? The mothers?' I asked.

'Yes, in some cases,' said Mitchell. 'And I'd have a nice, cool little summer-house down near the artificial lake, out of earshot of the house, where the bullock-drivers could sit with their pipes after tea, and tell yarns, and talk in their own language. And I'd have boats on the lake, too, in case an old Oxford or Cambridge man, or an old sailor came along—it might put years on to his life to have a pull at the oars. You remember that old sailor we saw in charge of the engine back there at the Government tank? You saw how he had the engine?—clean and bright as a new pin—everything spick-and-span and ship-shape, and his hut fixed up like a ship's cabin. I believe he thinks he's at sea half his time, and shoving her through it, instead of pumping muddy water out of a hole in the baking scrubs for starving stock. Or maybe he reckons he's keeping her afloat.'

'And would you have fish in this lake of yours?' I asked.

'Oh, yes,' said Mitchell, 'and any ratty old shepherd or sundowner, that's gone mad of heat and loneliness—like the old codger we met back yonder—he could sit by the lagoon in the cool of the evening and fish to his heart's content with a string and a bent pin, and dream he's playing truant from school and fishing in the brook near his native village in England about fifty years ago. It would seem more real than fishing in the dust as some mad old Bushmen do.'

'But you'd draw the line somewhere?' I asked.

'No,' said Mitchell, 'not even at poets. I'd try to cure them, too, with good wholesome food and plenty of physical exercise. The Lost Souls' Hotel would be

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a refuge for men who'd been jail-birds once as well as men who were gentlemen once, and for physical wrecks and ruined drunkards as well as healthy honest shearers. I'd sit down and talk to the boozer or felon just as if I thought he was as good a man as me—and he might be for that matter—God knows.

'The sick man would be kept till he recovered, or died; and the boozer, suffering from a recovery, I'd keep him till he was on his legs again.'

'Then you'd have to have a doctor,' I said.

'Yes,' said Mitchell, 'I'd fix all that up all right. I wouldn't bother much about a respectable medical practitioner from the city. I'd get a medical wreck who had a brilliant career before him once in England and got into disgrace, and cleared out to the colonies—a man who knows what the D.T.'s is—a man who's been through it all and knows it all.'

'Then you'd want a manager, or a clerk or secretary,' I suggested.

'I suppose I would,' said Mitchell. 'I've got no head for figures. I suppose I'd have to advertise for him. If an applicant came with the highest testimonials of character, and especially if one was signed by a parson, I'd tell him to call again next week; and if a young man could prove that he came of a good Christian family, and went to church regularly, and sang in the choir, and taught Sunday School, I'd tell him that he needn't come again, that the vacancy was filled, for I couldn't trust him. The man who's been extra religious and honest and hard-working in his young days is most likely to go wrong afterwards. I'd sooner trust some poor old devil of a clerk who'd got into the hands of a woman or racing men when he was young, and went wrong, and served his time for embezzlement; anyway, I'd take him out and give him another chance.'

'And what about woman's influence?' I asked.

'Oh, I suppose there'd have to be a woman, if only to

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keep the doctor on the line. I'd get a woman with a past, one that hadn't been any better than she should have been, they're generally the most kind-hearted in the end. Say an actress who'd come down in the world, or an old opera-singer who'd lost her voice but could still sing a little. A woman who knows what trouble is. And I'd get a girl to keep her company, a sort of housemaid, with a couple of black gins or half-castes to help her. I'd get hold of some poor girl who'd been deceived and deserted: and a baby or two wouldn't be an objection—the kids would amuse the chaps and help humanise the place.'

'And what if the manageress fell in love with the doctor?' I asked.

'Well, I couldn't provide against love,' said Mitchell. 'I fell in love myself more than once—and I don't suppose I'd have been any worse off if I'd have stayed in love. Ah, well! But suppose she did fall in love with the doctor and marry him, or suppose she fell in love with him and didn't marry him, for that matter—and suppose the girl fell in love with the secretary? There wouldn't be any harm done; it would only make them more contented with the home and bind them to it. They'd be a happy family, and the Lost Souls' Hotel would be more cheerful and homelike than ever.'

'But supposing they all fell in love with each other and cleared out,' I said.

'I don't see what they'd have to clear out for,' said Mitchell. 'But suppose they did. There's more than one medical wreck in Australia, and more than one woman with a past, and more than one broken old clerk who went wrong and was found out, and who steadied down in jail, and there's more than one poor girl that's been deceived. I could easily replace 'em. And the Lost Souls' Hotel might be the means of patching up many wrecked lives in that way—giving people with pasts the chance of another future, so to speak.'

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'I suppose you'd have music and books and pictures?' I said.

'Oh, yes,' said Mitchell. 'But I wouldn't have any bitter or sex-problem books. They do no good. Problems have been the curse of the world ever since it started. I think one noble, kindly, cheerful character in a book does more good than all the clever villains or romantic adventurers ever invented. And I think a man ought to get rid of his maudlin sentiment in private, or when he's drunk. It's a pity that every writer couldn't put all his bitterness into one book and then burn it.

'No; I'd have good cheerful books of the best and brightest sides of human nature—Charles Dickens, and Mark Twain, and Bret Harte, and those men. And I'd have all Australian pictures—showing the brightest and best side of Australian life. And I'd have all Australian songs. I wouldn't have "Swannie Ribber," or "Home, Sweet Home," or "Annie Laurie," or any of those old songs sung at the Lost Souls' Hotel—they're the cause of more heartbreaks and drink and suicide in the Bush than anything else. And if a Jackeroo got up to sing "Just before the battle, mother," or "Mother bit me in me sleep," he'd find it was just before the battle all right. He'd have to go out and sleep in the scrub, where the mosquitos and bulldog ants would bite him out of his sleep. I hate the man who's always whining about his mother through his nose, because, as a rule, he never cared a rap for his old mother, nor for anyone else, except his own paltry, selfish little self.

'I'd have intellectual and elevating conversation for those that—'

'Who'd take charge of that department?' I inquired hurriedly.

'Well,' reflected Mitchell, 'I did have an idea of taking it on myself for a while anyway; but, come to think of it, the doctor or the woman with the past would have more

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experience; and I could look after that part of the business at a pinch. Of course you're not in a position to judge as to my ability in the intellectual line; you see, I've had no one to practise on since I've been with you. But no matter— There'd be intellectual conversation for the benefit of black-sheep newchums. And any broken-down actors that came along could get up a play if they liked—it would brighten up things and help elevate the bullock-drivers and sundowners. I'd have a stage fixed up and a bit of scenery. I'd do all I could to attract shearers to the place after shearing, and keep them from rushing to the next shanty with their cheques, or down to Sydney, to be cleaned out by barmaids.

'And I'd have the hero squashed in the last act for a selfish sneak, and marry the girl to the villain—he'd be more likely to make her happy in the end.'

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'And what about the farm?' I asked. 'I suppose you'd get some expert from the agricultural college to manage that?'

'No,' said Mitchell. 'I'd get some poor drought-ruined selector and put him in charge of the vegetation. Only, the worst of it is,' he reflected, 'if you take a selector who has bullocked all his life to raise crops on dusty, stony patches in the scrubs, and put him on land where there's plenty of water and manure, and where he's only got to throw the seed on the ground and then light his pipe and watch it grow, he's apt to get disheartened. But that's human nature.

'And, of course, I'd have to have a "character" about the place—a sort of identity and joker to brighten up

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things. I wouldn't get a man who'd been happy and comfortable all his life; I'd get hold of some old codger whose wife had nagged him till she died, and who'd been sold off many times, and run in for drowning his sorrows, and who started as an undertaker and failed at that, and finally got a job pottering round—gardener, or gatekeeper, or something—in a lunatic asylum. I'd get him. He'd most likely be a humourist and a philosopher, and he'd help cheer up the Lost Souls' Hotel. I reckon the lost souls would get very fond of him.'

'And would you have drink at "Lost Souls'"?' I asked.

'Yes,' said Mitchell. 'I'd have the best beer and spirits and wine to be had. After tea I'd let every man have just enough to make him feel comfortable and happy, and as good and clever, and innocent and honest as any other man, but no more. But if a poor devil came along in the horrors, with every inch of him jumping, and snakes, and green-eyed yahoos, and flaming-nosed bunyips chasing him, we'd take him in and give him soothing draughts, and nurse him, and watch him, and clear him out with purgatives, and keep giving him nips of good whisky, and, above all, we'd sympathise with him, and tell him that we were worse than he was many a time. We wouldn't tell him what a weak, selfish man he was, or harp on his ruined life. We'd try to make him out a good deal better morally than he really was. It's remorse that hurries most men to hell—especially in the Bush. When a man firmly believes he is a hopeless case, then there's no hope for him: but let him have doubts and there's a chance. Make him believe that there are far worse cases that his. We wouldn't preach the sin of dissipation to him, no—but we'd try to show him the *folly* of a wasted life. I ought to be able to preach that, God knows.

'And, above all, we'd try to drive out of his head the cursed old popular idea that it's hard to reform—that a man's got to fight a hard battle with himself to get away

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from drink—pity drunkards can't believe how easy it is. And we'd put it to him straight whether his few hours' enjoyment were worth the days he had to suffer hell for it.'

'And, likely as not,' I said, 'when you'd put him on his feet he'd take the nearest track to the next shanty, and go on a howling spree, and come back to Lost Souls in a week, raving, and worse than ever. What would you do then?'

'We'd take him in again, and build him up some more; and a third or fourth time if necessary. I believe in going right on with a thing once I take it in hand. And if he didn't turn up after the last spree we'd look for him up the scrub and bring him in and let him die on a bed, and make his death as comfortable as possible. I've seen one man die on the ground, and found one dead in the Bush. We'd bury him under a gum and put "Sacred to the Memory of a Man who Died. (Let Him R.I.P.)" over him. I'd have a nice little graveyard, with gums for tombstones—and I'd have some original epitaphs—I promise you.'

'And how much gratitude would you expect to get out of the Lost Souls' Hotel?' I asked.

'None,' said Mitchell, promptly. 'It wouldn't be a Gratitude Discovery Syndicate. People might say that the Lost Souls' Hotel was a den for kidnapping women and girls to be used as decoys for the purpose of hocussing and robbing Bushmen, and the law and retribution might come after me—but I'd fight the thing out. Or they might want to make a K.C.M.G., or a god of me, and worship me before they hung me. I reckon a philanthropist or reformer is lucky if he escapes with a whole skin in the end, let alone his character— But there!— Talking of gratitude: it's the fear of ingratitude that keeps thousands from doing good. It's just as paltry and selfish and cowardly as any other fear that curses the world—it's rather more selfish

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than most fears, in fact—take the fear of being thought a coward, or being considered eccentric, or conceited, or affected, or too good, or too bad, for instance. The man that's always canting about the world's ingratitude has no gratitude owing to him as a rule—generally the reverse—he ought to be grateful to the world for being let live. He broods over the world's ingratitude until he gets to be a cynic. He sees the world like the outside of a window, as it were, with the blind drawn and the dead, cold moonlight shining on it, and he passes on with a sour face; whereas, if he took the trouble to step inside he'd most likely find a room full of ruddy firelight, and sympathy and cheerfulness, and kindness, and love, and gratitude. Sometimes, when he's right down on his uppers, and forced to go amongst people and hustle for bread, he gets a lot of surprises at the amount of kindness he keeps running against in the world—and in places where he'd never have expected to find it. But—ah, well! I'm getting maudlin.'

'And you've forgot all about the Lost Souls' Hotel,' I said.

'No, I haven't,' said Mitchell; 'I'd fix that up all right. As soon as I'd got things going smoothly under a man I could trust, I'd tie up every penny I had for the benefit of the concern; get some 'white men' for trustees, and take the track again. I'm getting too old to stay long in one place—(I'm a lost soul that always got along better in another place). I'm so used to the track that if I was shut up in a house I'd get walking up and down in my room of nights and disturb the folk; and, besides, I'd feel lost and light-shouldered without the swag.'

'So you'd put all your money in the concern?'

'Yes—except a pound or two to go on the track with—for, who knows, I might come along there, dusty and tired, and ragged and hard-up and old, some day, and be very glad of a night's rest at the Lost Souls' Hotel. But I wouldn't let on that I was old Mitchell, the millionaire, who founded

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Lost Souls'. They might be too officious, and I hate fuss. . . . But it's time to take the track, Harry.'

. . . . . .

There came a cool breeze with sunset; we stood up stiffly, shouldered our swags and tucker-bags, and pushed on, for we had to make the next water before we camped. We were out of tobacco, so we borrowed some from one of the bullock-drivers.

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THE BOOZERS' HOME

'A DIPSOMANIAC,' said Mitchell, 'needs sympathy and common-sense treatment. (Sympathy's a grand and glorious thing, taking it all round and looking at it any way you will: a little of it makes a man think that the world's a good world after all, and there's room and hope for sinners, and that life's worth living; enough of it makes him sure of it: and an overdose of sympathy makes a man *feel* weak and ashamed of himself, and so moves him to stop whining—and wining—and buck up.)

'Now, I'm not taking the case of a workman who goes on the spree on pay night and sweats the drink out of himself at work next day, nor a slum-bred brute who guzzles for the love of it; but a man with brains, who drinks to drown his intellect or his memory. He's generally a man under it all, and a sensitive, generous, gentle man with finer feelings as often as not. The best and cleverest and whitest men in the world seem to take to drink mostly. It's an awful pity. Perhaps it's because they're straight and the world's crooked and they can see things too plain. And I suppose in the Bush the loneliness and the thoughts of the girl-world they left behind help to sink 'em.

'Now a drunkard seldom reforms at home, because he's always surrounded by the signs of the ruin and misery he has brought on the home; and the sight and thought of it sets him off again before he's had time to recover from the last spree. Then, again, the noblest wife in the world mostly goes the wrong way to work with a drunken husband—nearly everything she does is calculated to irritate

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him. If, for instance, he brings a bottle home from the pub, it shows that he wants to stay at home and not go back to the pub any more; but the first thing the wife does is to get hold of the bottle and plant it, or smash it before his eyes, and that maddens him in the state he is in then.

'No. A dipsomaniac needs to be taken away from home for a while. I knew a man that got so bad that the way he acted at home one night frightened him, and next morning he went into an inebriate home of his own accord —to a place where his friends had been trying to get him for a year past. For the first day or two he was nearly dead with remorse and shame—mostly shame; and he didn't know what they were going to do to him next—he only wanted them to kill him quick and be done with it. He reckons he felt as bad as if he was in jail. But there were ten other patients there, and one or two were worse than he was, and that comforted him a lot. They compared notes and sympathised and helped each other. They discovered that all their wives were noble women. He struck one or two surprises too—one of the patients was a doctor who'd attended him one time, and another was an old boss of his, and they got very chummy. And there was a man there who was standing for Parliament—he was supposed to be having a rest down the coast. . . . Yes, my old mate felt very bad for the first day or two; it was all Yes, Nurse, and Thank you, Nurse, and Yes, Doctor, and No, Doctor, and Thank you, Doctor. But, inside a week, he was calling the doctor "Ol' Pill-Box" behind his back, and making love to one of the nurses.

'But he said it was pitiful when women relatives came to visit patients the first morning. It shook the patients up a lot, but I reckon it did 'em good. There were well-bred old lady mothers in black, and hard-working, haggard wives and loving daughters—and the expressions of sympathy and faith and hope in those women's faces! My

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old mate said it was enough in itself to make a man swear off drink forever. . . . Ah, God—what a world it is!

'Reminds me how I once went with the wife of another old mate of mine to see him. He was in a lunatic asylum. It was about the worst hour I ever had in my life, and I've had some bad ones. The way she tried to coax him back to his old self. She thought she could do it when all the doctors had failed. But I'll tell you about him some other time.

'The old mate said that the principal part of the treatment was supposed to be injection of bi-chloride of gold or something, and it was supposed to be a secret. It might have been water and sugar for all he knew, and he thought it was. You see, when patients got better they were allowed out, two by two, on their honour—one to watch the other—and it worked. But it was necessary to have an extra hold on them; so they were told that if they were a minute late for "treatment," or missed one injection, all the good would be undone. This was dinged into their ears all the time. Same as many things are done in the Catholic religion—to hold the people. My old mate said that, as far as the medical treatment was concerned, he could do all that was necessary himself. But it was the sympathy that counted, especially the sympathy between the patients themselves. They always got hold of a new patient and talked to him and cheered him up; he nearly always came in thinking he was the most miserable wretch in this world. And it comforts a man and strengthens him and makes him happier to meet another man who's worse off or sicker, or has been worse swindled than he has been. That's human nature. . . . And a man will take draughts from a nurse and eat for her when he wouldn't do it for his own wife—not even though she had been a trained nurse herself. And if a patient took a bad turn in the night at the Boozers' Home and got up to hunt the snakes out of his room, he wouldn't be sworn at, or laughed at, or held down; no,

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they'd help him shoo the snakes out and comfort him. My old mate said that, when he got better, one of the new patients reckoned that he licked St Pathrick at managing snakes. And when he came out he didn't feel a bit ashamed of his experience. The institution didn't profess to cure anyone of drink, only to mend up shattered nerves and build up wrecked constitutions; give them back some will power if they weren't too far gone. And they set my old mate on his feet all right. When he went in his life seemed lost, he had the horror of being sober, he couldn't start the day without a drink or do any business without it. He couldn't live for more than two hours without a drink; but when he came out he didn't feel as if he wanted it. He reckoned that those six weeks in the institution were the happiest he'd ever spent in his life, and he wished the time had been longer; he says he'd never met with so much sympathy and genius, and humour and human nature under one roof before. And he said it was nice and novel to be looked after and watched and physicked and bossed by a pretty nurse in uniform—but I don't suppose he told his wife that. And when he came out he never took the trouble to hide the fact that he'd been in. If any of his friends had a drunkard in the family, he'd recommend the institution and do his best to get him into it. But when he came out he firmly believed that if he took one drink he'd be a lost man. He made a mania of that. One curious effect was that, for some time after he left the institution, he'd sometimes feel suddenly in high spirits—with nothing to account for it—something like he used to feel when he had half a dozen whiskies in him; then suddenly he'd feel depressed and sort of hopeless—with nothing to account for that either—just as if he was suffering a recovery. But those moods never lasted long and he soon grew out of them altogether. He didn't flee temptation. He'd knock round the pubs on Saturday nights with his old mates, but never drank anything but soft stuff—he was

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always careful to smell his glass for fear of an accident or a trick. He drank gallons of ginger-beer, milk-and-soda and lemonade; and he got very fond of sweets, too—he'd never liked them before. He said he enjoyed the novelty of the whole thing and his mates amused him at first; but he found he had to leave them early in the evening, and, after a while, he dropped them altogether. They seemed such fools when they were drunk (they'd never seemed fools to him before). And, besides, as they got full, they'd get suspicious of him, and then mad at him, because he couldn't see things as they could. That reminds me that it nearly breaks a man's heart when his old drinking chum turns teetotaller—it's worse than if he got married or died. When two mates meet and one is drunk and the other sober there is only one of two things for them to do if they want to hit it together—either the drunken mate must get sober or the sober mate drunk. And that reminds me: Take the case of two old mates who've been together all their lives, say they always had their regular sprees together and went through the same stages of drunkness together, and suffered their recoveries and sobered up together, and each could stand about the same quantity of drink and one never got drunker than the other. Each, when he's boozing, reckons his mate the cleverest man and the hardest case in the world—second to himself. But one day it happens, by a most extraordinary combination of circumstances, that Bill, being sober, meets Jim very drunk, and pretty soon Bill is the most disgusted man in this world. He never would have dreamed that his old mate could make such a fool and such a public spectacle of himself. And Bill's disgust intensifies all the time he is helping Jim home, and Jim arguing with him and wanting to fight him, and slobbering over him and wanting to love him by turns, until Bill swears he'll give Jim a hammering as soon as ever he's able to stand steady on his feet.'

. . . . . .

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'I suppose your old boozing mate's wife was very happy when he reformed,' I said to Mitchell.

'Well, no,' said Mitchell, rubbing his head rather ruefully. 'I suppose it was an exceptional case. But I knew her well, and the fact is that she got more discontented and thinner, and complained and nagged him worse than she'd ever done in his drinking days. And she'd never been afraid of him. Perhaps it was this way: She loved and married a careless, good-natured, drinking scamp, and when he reformed and became a careful, hard-working man, and an honest and respected fellow-townsman, she was disappointed in him. He wasn't the man that won her heart when she was a girl. Or maybe he was only company for her when he was half drunk. Or maybe lots of things. Perhaps he'd killed the love in her before he reformed—and reformed too late. I wonder how a man feels when he finds out for the first time that his wife doesn't love him any longer? But my old mate wasn't the nature to find out that sort of thing. Ah, well! If a woman caused all our trouble, my God! women have suffered for it since—and they suffer like martyrs mostly and with the patience of working bullocks. Anyway it goes, if I'm the last man in the world, and the last woman is the worst, and there's only room for one more in Heaven I'll step down at once and take my chance in Blazes.'

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THE SEX-PROBLEM AGAIN

IT was Mitchell's habit to take an evening off now and then from yarning or reflecting, and proceed, in a most methodical manner, to wash his spare shirts and patch his pants. I was in the habit of contributing to some Sydney papers, and every man is an editor at heart, so, at other times, Mitchellwould take another evening off, and root out my swag, and go through my papers in the same methodical manner, and make alterations and additions without comment or reference to me; and sometimes he'd read a little thing of my own which didn't meet his views, and accidentally drop it into the fire; and at other times he'd get hold of some rhyme or sketch that was troubling me, and wrap it up and give it to a passing mailman unbeknown to me. The unexpected appearance of such articles in the paper, as well as the effects of the involuntary collaboration in other pieces, gave me several big surprises.

It was in camp on a fencing contract west of Bourke. We had a book which we'd borrowed from a library at Bourke for a year or two—never mind the name of it—it was in '91 or '92, and the sex-problem was booming then.

I had been surreptitiously tearing some carefully-written slips of manuscript—leaves taken from an old pocket-book —into small pieces; I dropped them, with apparent carelessness, into the fire and stood with my back to it.

'I'll bet five pounds,' said Mitchell, suddenly, 'that you've been trying your hand on a sex-problem story.'

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I shifted uneasily and brought my hands from behind me into my pockets. 'Well, to tell you the truth,' I admitted, 'I have.'

'I thought so,' exclaimed Mitchell. 'We'll be put to the expense of sending you to Sydney for medical treatment yet. You've been having too easy times lately, plenty of hard graft and no anxiety about tucker or the future. What are the symptoms?'

'Well,' I said, taking a hand out to scratch the back of my head, 'the plot looked all right—at first sight.'

'So there's a plot, is there? Well, in the first place, a plot is a problem. Well, what's the plot? . . . Come on, you needn't be frightened to tell an old mate like me.'

'Well,' I said, 'the yarn looked all right at first sight; that article of "T.'s" in the *Bulletin* turned me off it; listen and see what you think of it: There was a young fellow, a bit of a genius—'

'Just so, it's the geniuses that build the sex-problems. It's an autobiography. Go on.'

'Well, he married a girl.'

Mitchell (*sotto voce*): 'God help her.'

'He loved her, and she loved him: but after they'd been married awhile he found out that, although he understood her, she didn't and couldn't possibly ever understand him.'

'Yes,' commented Mitchell, 'and if he hadn't caught the sex-problem, nor been reading about it, he would never have found that out.'

'It was a terrible disappointment,' I continued—I had got into the habit of taking Mitchell's interruptions and comments as matters of course—'he saw that his life would be a hell with her—'

Mitchell: 'Didn't strike him that her life would be a hell with him?'

'They had no thought in common.'

Mitchell: 'She was in her right mind then.'

'But he couldn't leave her because he loved her, and

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because he knew that she loved him and would break her heart if he left her.'

'Must have been a pretty cock-sure sort of a fellow,' remarked Mitchell, 'but all geniuses are.'

'When he was with her he saw all her obstinacy, unreason, and selfishness; but when he was away he only saw her good points.'

Mitchell: 'Pity such men don't stop away.'

'He thought and thought, and brooded over it till his life was a hell—'

Mitchell: 'Jes-so: thanks to the problemaniacs.'

'He thought of killing her and himself, and so taking her with him—'

'Where?' asked Mitchell. 'He must have loved her a lot. . . . Good Lord! That shows the awful effects of the sex-problem on the mind of a healthy young man like you'; and Mitchell stood up.

'He lay awake by her side at nights thinking and fighting the thing out.'

'And you've been lying awake, thinking, with me and "the Oracle" by your side. We'll have to plant the tommy-hawk, and watch you by turns at night till you get over this.'

'One night he rested on his elbow, and watched her sleeping, and tried to reconstruct his ideal out of her, and, just when he was getting into a happier frame of mind, her mouth fell open, and she snored. . . . I didn't get any further than the snore,' I said.

'No, of course you didn't,' said Mitchell, 'and none of the sex-problemers ever will—unless they get as far as "blanky." You might have made the snore cure him; did it?'

'No, it was making things worse in my idea of the yarn. He fell back and lay staring at the ceiling in a hopeless kind of a way.'

'Then he was a fit case for the lunatic asylum. . . . Now, look here, Harry, you're a good-natured, soft old

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fool when you're in your right mind; just you go on being a good-natured, soft old fool, and don't try to make a problem out of yourself or anybody else, or you'll come to a bad end. A pocket-book's to keep your accounts in, not to take notes in (you take them in your head and use 'em in your arms), not to write sex-problem rot in—that's spoilt many a good pocket-book, and many a good man. You've got a girl you're talking about going back to as soon as we've finished this contract. Don't you make a problem of her; make a happy wife and mother of her. . . . I was very clever when I was young'—and here Mitchell's voice took a tinge of bitterness, or sadness. 'I used to make problems out of things. . . . I ain't much to boast of now. . . . Seems to me that a good many men want to make angels of their wives without first taking trouble of making saints of themselves. We want to make women's ways our ways—it would be just as fair to make our ways theirs. Some men want to be considered gods in their own homes; you'll generally find that sort of men very small potatoes outside; if they weren't they wouldn't bother so much about being cocks on their own little dunghills. . . . And again, old mates seldom quarrel, because they understand each other's moods. Now, if you went brooding round for any length of time I'd say to you, "Now then, Harry, what have I been doing to you? Spit it out, old man." And you'd do the same by me; but how many men would take even that much trouble with their wives?'

A breeze stirred the mulga and brought the sound of a good voice singing in the surveyors' camp:—

'Should old acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to min'?
Should old acquaintance be forgot
And the days of Auld Lang Syne?'

'That damned old tune will upset the Oracle[1] for the rest of the night,' I said.

[1] The Oracle—*see* 'Story of the Oracle, in The Country I Come From.'

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'Now, there's the Oracle,' said Mitchell, 'he was wronged by a woman as few men are wronged; his life was ruined—but he isn't the man to take any stock in sex-problems on account of her. He thinks he's great on problems, but he isn't. It all amounts to this—that he's sorry for most men and all women and tries to act up to it to the best of his ability; and if he ain't a Christian, God knows what is—I don't. No matter what a woman does to you, or what you think she does to you, there come times, sooner or later, when you feel sorry for her—deep down in your heart—that is if you're a man. And, no matter what action or course you might take against her, and no matter how right or justified you might seem in doing it, there comes a time when, deep down in your heart, you feel mean and doubtful about your own part. You can take that as a general thing as regards men against women, and man against man, I think. And I believe that deep-down feeling of being doubtful, or mean, or sorry, that comes afterwards, when you are cooler and know more about the world, is a right and natural thing, and we ought to act more in accordance with it.'

Came the refrain from the surveyors' camp:—

'We twa hae run about the braes,
An' pu'd the gowans fine;
But we've wandered mony a weary foot
Sin' Auld Lang Syne.'

'We feel sorry for our quarrels with our worst enemy when we see him lying still and quiet—dead. Why can't we try and feel a bit sorry beforehand?'

'For Auld Lang Syne.
We twa ha' padl't i' the burn,
Fra mornin' sun till dine;
But seas between us braid ha' roar'd
Sin' Auld Lang Syne.'

'I used to feel blazing bitter against things one time but it never hurt anybody but myself in the end. I argued

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and quarrelled with a girl once—and made a problem of the thing and went away. She's married to a brute now, and I'm what I am. I made a problem of a good home or the world once, and went against the last man in God's world that I should have gone against, and turned my back on his hand, and left him. His hand was very cold the next time I took it in mine. We don't want problems to make us more bitter against the world than we get sometimes.'

'And here's a han' my trusty frien',
An' gie's a han' o' thine,
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet
For Auld Lang Syne.'

'And that song's the answer of all problems,' said Mitchell.

. . . . . .

But it was I who lay awake and thought that night.

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THE THINGS WE DARE NOT TELL

THE fields are fair in autumn yet, and the sun's still shining there,
But we bow our heads and we brood and fret, because of the masks we wear;
Or we nod and smile the social while, and we say we're doing well,
But we break our hearts, oh, we break our hearts! for the things we must not tell.

There's the old love wronged ere the new was won, there's the light of long ago;
There's the cruel lie that we suffer for, and the public must not know.
So we go through life with a ghastly mask, and we're doing fairly well,
While they break our hearts, oh, they kill our hearts! do the things we must not tell.

We see but pride in a selfish breast, while a heart is breaking there;
Oh, the world would be such a kindly world if all men's hearts lay bare!
We live and share the living lie, we are doing very well,
While they eat our hearts as the years go by, do the things we dare not tell.

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We bow us down to a dusty shrine, or a temple in the East,
Or we stand and drink to the world-old creed, with the coffins at the feast;
We fight it down, and we live it down, or we bear it bravely well,
But the best men die of a broken heart for the things they cannot tell.

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THE ROMANCE OF THE SWAG

THE Australian swag fashion is the easiest way in the world of carrying a load. I ought to know something about carrying loads: I've carried babies, which are the heaviest and most awkward and heart-breaking loads in this world for a boy or man to carry, I fancy. God remember mothers who slave about the housework (and do sometimes a man's work in addition in the Bush) with a heavy, squalling kid on one arm! I've humped logs on the Selection, 'burning off,' with loads of fencing posts and rails and palings out of steep, rugged gullies (and was happier then, perhaps); I've carried a shovel, crowbar, heavy 'rammer,' a dozen insulators on an average (strung round my shoulders with raw flax) — to say nothing of soldering kit, tucker bag, billy and climbing spurs—all day on a telegraph line in rough country in New Zealand, and in places where a man had to manage his load with one hand and help himself climb with the other; and I've helped hump and drag telegraph poles up cliffs and sidings where the horses couldn't go. I've carried a portmanteau on the hot dusty roads in green old Jackeroo days. Ask any actor who's been stranded and had to count railway sleepers from one town to another! he'll tell you what sort of an awkward load a portmanteau is, especially if there's a broken-hearted man underneath it. I've tried knapsack fashion—one of the least healthy and most likely to give a man sores; I've carried my belongings on a

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three-bushel sack slung over my shoulder—blankets, tucker, spare boots and poetry all lumped together. I tried carrying a load on my head, and got a crick in my neck and spine for days. I've carried a load on my mind that should have been shared by editors and publishers. I've helped hump luggage and furniture up to, and down from, a top flat in London. And I've carried swag for months out-back in Australia—and it was life, in spite of its 'squalidness' and meanness and wretchedness and hardship, and in spite of the fact that the world would have regarded us as 'tramps' —and a free life amongst *men* from all the world!

The Australian swag was born of Australia and no other land—of the Great Lone Land of magnificent distances and bright heat; the land of Self-reliance, and Never-give-in, and Help-your-mate. The grave of many of the world's tragedies and comedies—royal and otherwise. The land where a man out of employment might shoulder his swag in Adelaide and take the track, and years later walk into a hut on the Gulf, or never be heard of any more, or a body be found in the Bush and buried by the mounted police, or never found and never buried—what does it matter?

The land I love above all others—not because it was kind to me, but because I was born on Australian soil, and because of the foreign father who died at his work in the ranks of Australian pioneers, and because of many things. Australia! my country! her very name is music to me. God bless Australia! for the sake of the great hearts of the heart of her! God keep her clear of the old-world shams and social lies and mockery, and callous commercialism, and sordid shame! and Heaven send that, if ever in my time her sons are called upon to fight for her young life and honour, I die with the first rank of them and be buried in Australian ground.

But this will probably be called false, forced or 'maudlin sentiment' here in England, where the mawkish sentiment of the music halls, and the popular applause it receives, is

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enough to make a healthy man sick, and is only equalled by music-hall vulgarity. So I'll get on.

In the old digging days the knapsack, or straps-across-the-chest fashion, was tried, but the load pressed on a man's chest and impeded his breathing, and a man needs to have his bellows free on long tracks in hot, stirless weather. Then the 'horse-collar,' or rolled military overcoat style—swag over one shoulder and under the other arm—was tried, but it was found to be too hot for the Australian climate, and was discarded along with Wellington boots and leggings. Until recently, Australian city artists and editors—who knew as much about the Bush as Downing Street knows about the British colonies in general—seemed to think the horse-collar swag was still in existence; and some artists gave the swagman a stick, as if he were a tramp of civilisation with an eye on the backyard and a fear of the dog. English artists, by the way, seem firmly convinced that the Australian Bushman is born in Wellington boots with a polish on 'em you could shave yourself by.

The swag is usually composed of a tent 'fly' or strip of calico (a cover for the swag and a shelter in bad weather—in New Zealand it is oilcloth or waterproof twill), a couple of blankets, blue by custom and preference, as that colour shows the dirt less than any other (hence the name 'bluey' for swag), and the core is composed of spare clothing and small personal effects. To make or 'roll up' your swag: lay the fly or strip of calico on the ground, blueys on top of it; across one end, with eighteen inches or so to spare, lay your spare trousers, shirt, etc., folded, light boots tied together by the laces toe to heel, books, bundle of old letters, portraits, or whatever little knick-knacks you have or care to carry, bag of needles, thread, pen and ink, spare patches for your pants, bootlaces, etc. Lay or arrange the pile so that it will roll evenly with the swag (some pack the lot in an old pillowslip or canvas bag), take a fold over of

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blanket and calico the whole length on each side, so as to reduce the width of the swag to, say, three feet, throw the spare end, with an inward fold, over the little pile of belongings, and then roll the whole to the other end, using your knees and judgment to make the swag tight, compact and artistic; when within eighteen inches of the loose end take an inward fold in that, and bring it up against the body of the swag. There is a strong suggestion of a roley-poley in a rag about the business, only the ends of the swag are folded in, in rings, and not tied. Fasten the swag with three or four straps, according to judgment and the supply of straps. To the top strap, for the swag is carried (and eased down in shanty bars and against walls or verandah posts when not on the track) in a more or less vertical position—to the top strap, and lowest, or lowest but one, fasten the ends of the shoulder strap (usually a towel is preferred as being softer to the shoulder), your coat being carried outside the swag at the back, under the straps. To the top strap fasten the string of the nose-bag, a calico bag about the size of a pillowslip, containing the tea, sugar and flour bags, bread, meat, baking powder, salt, etc., and brought, when the swag is carried from the left shoulder, over the right onto the chest, and so balancing the swag behind. But a swagman can throw a heavy swag in a nearly vertical position against his spine, slung from one shoulder only and without any balance, and carry it as easily as you might wear your overcoat. Some Bushmen arrange their belongings so neatly and conveniently, with swag straps in a sort of harness, that they can roll up the swag in about a minute, and unbuckle it and throw it out as easily as a roll of wall-paper, and there's the bed ready on the ground with the wardrobe for a pillow. The swag is always used for a seat on the track; it is a soft seat, so trousers last a long time. And, the dust being mostly soft and silky on the long tracks out-back, boots last marvellously. Fifteen miles a day is the average with the swag, but you must travel according to the water:

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if the next bore or tank is five miles on, and the next twenty beyond, you camp at the five-mile water to-night and do the twenty next day. But if it's thirty miles you have to do it. Travelling with the swag in Australia is variously and picturesquely described as 'humping bluey,' 'walking Matilda,' 'humping Matilda,' 'humping your drum,' 'being on the wallaby,' 'jabbing trotters,' and 'tea and sugar burglaring,' but most travelling shearers now call themselves trav'lers, and say simply 'on the track,' or 'carrying swag.'

And there you have the Australian swag. Men from all the world have carried it—lords and low-class Chinamen, saints and world martyrs, and felons, thieves and murderers, educated gentlemen and boors who couldn't sign their mark, gentlemen who fought for Poland and convicts who fought the world, women, and more than one woman disguised as a man. The Australian swag has held in its core letters and papers in all languages, the honour of great houses, and more than one national secret, papers that would send well-known and highly-respected men to jail, and proofs of the innocence of men going mad in prisons, life tragedies and comedies, fortunes and papers that secured titles and fortunes, and the last pence of lost fortunes, life secrets, portraits of mothers and dead loves, pictures of fair women, heart-breaking old letters written long ago by vanished hands, and the pencilled manuscript of more than one book which will be famous yet.

The weight of the swag varies from the light rouseabout's swag, containing one blanket and a clean shirt, to the 'royal Alfred,' with tent and all complete, and weighing part of a ton. Some old sundowners have a mania for gathering, from selectors' and shearers' huts, dust heaps, etc., heart-breaking loads of rubbish which can never be of any possible use to them or anyone else. Here is an inventory of the contents of the swag of an old tramp who was found dead on the track, lying on his face on the sand, with his

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swag on top of him, and his arms stretched straight out as if he were embracing the Mother Earth, or had made, with his last movement, the Sign of the Cross to the blazing heavens:—

Rotten old tent in rags. Filthy blue blanket, patched with squares of red and calico. Half of 'white blanket,' nearly black now, patched with pieces of various material and sewn to half of red blanket. Three-bushel sack slit open. Pieces of sacking. Part of a woman's skirt. Two rotten old pairs of moleskin trousers. One leg of a pair of trousers. Back of a shirt. Half a waistcoat. Two tweed coats, green, old and rotting, and patched with calico, blanket, etc. Large bundle of assorted rags for patches, all rotten. Leaky billy can, containing fishing-line, papers, suet, needles and cotton, etc., etc. Jam tins, medicine bottles, corks on strings, to hang to his hat to keep the flies off (a sign of madness in the Bush, for the corks would madden a sane man sooner than the flies could). Three boots of different sizes, all belonging to the right foot, and a left slipper. Coffee-pot, without handle or spout, and quart-pot full of rubbish—broken knives and forks, with the handles burnt off, spoons, etc., etc., picked up on rubbish heaps; and many rusty nails, to be used as buttons, I suppose.

Broken saw blade, hammer, broken crockery, old pannikins, small rusty frying-pan without a handle, children's old shoes, many bits of old boot leather and green hide, part of yellow-back novel, mutilated English dictionary, grammar and arithmetic book, a ready reckoner, a cookery book, a bulgy Anglo-foreign dictionary, part of a Shakespeare, book in French and book in German, and a book on etiquette and courtship. A heavy pair of blucher boots, with uppers parched and cracked, and soles so patched (patch over patch) with leather, boot protectors, hoop iron and hob nails that they were about two inches thick, and the boots weighed over five pounds. (If you

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don't believe me go into the Melbourne Museum, where, in a glass case in a place of honour, you will see a similar, perhaps the same, pair of bluchers labelled 'An Example of Colonial Industry.') And in the core of the swag was a sugar bag tied tightly with a whip-lash, and containing another old skirt, rolled very tight and fastened with many turns of a length of clothesline, which last, I suppose, he carried to hang himself with if he felt that way. The skirt was rolled round a small packet of old portraits and almost indecipherable letters—one from a woman who had evidently been a sensible woman and a widow, and who stated in the letter that she did not intend to get married again as she had enough to do already, slavin' her fingernails off to keep a family, without having a second husband to keep. And her answer was 'final for good and all,' and it wasn't no use comin' 'bungfoodlin'' round her again. If he did she'd set Satan onto him. 'Satan' was a dog, I suppose.

The letter was addressed to 'Dear Bill,' as were others. There were no envelopes. The letters were addressed from no place in particular, so there weren't any means of identifying the dead man. The police buried him under a gum, and a young trooper cut on the tree the words,—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF

BILL,

WHO DIED.

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'BUCKOLTS' GATE'

AN AUSTRALIAN STORY

PROLOGUE

OLD Abel Albury had a genius for getting the bull by the tail with a tight grip, and holding on with both hands and an obstinacy born of ignorance—and not necessarily for the sake of self-preservation or selfishness—while all the time the bull might be, so to speak, rooting up life-long friendships and neighbourly relations, and upsetting domestic customs and traditions with his horns.

Yes, Uncle Abel was always grasping the wrong end of things, and sticking to it with that human mulishness which is often stronger, and more often wearies and breaks down the opposition than an intelligent man's arguments. He was—or professed to be, the family said—unable for a long time to distinguish between his two grand-nephews, one of whom was short and fat, while the other was tall and thin, the only points of resemblance between them being that each possessed the old family nose and eyes. When they were boys he used to lay the strap about one in mistake for the other. They had a saying that Uncle Abel saw with ten squinting eyes.

Also, he could never—or would not, as the family said—remember names. He referred to Mrs Porter, a thin, haggard selector's wife, as 'Mrs Stout,' and he balanced matters by calling Mrs Southwick 'Mrs Porterwicket'—

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when he didn't address her as 'Mrs What's-the-woman's-name'—and he succeeded in deeply offending both ladies.

Uncle Abel was Mrs Carey's uncle. Down at the lower end of Carey's selection at Rocky Rises, in the extreme corner of the lower or outer paddock, were slip-rails opening into the main road, which ran down along the siding, round the foot of a spur from ridge, and out west. These slip-rails were called 'The Lower Slip-rails' by the family, and it occurred to Uncle Abel to refer to them as 'Buckolts' Gate,' for no other reason apparently than that Buckolts' farm lay in that direction. The farm was about a mile further on, on the other side of the creek, and the gate leading to it from the main road was round the spur, out of sight of Carey's selection. It is quite possible that Uncle Abel reasoned the thing out for days, for of such material are some human brains. Slip-rails, or a slip-panel, is a panel of fencing of which the rails are made to be slipped out of the mortise holes in the posts so as to give passage to horses, vehicles and cattle. I suppose Abel called it a gate, because he was always going to hang a proper gate there some day. The family were unaware of his new name for the Lower Slip-rails, and after he had, on one or two occasions, informed the boys that they would find a missing cow or horse at the Buckolts' Gate, and they had found it calmly camped at the Lower Slip-rails, and after he had made several appointments to meet parties at Buckolts' Gate, and had been found leaning obstinately on the fence by the Lower Slip-rails with no explanation to offer other than that he *was* waiting at Buckolts' Gate, they began to fear that he was becoming weak in his mind.

Act I

It was New Year's Eve at Rocky Rises. There was no need for fireworks nor bonfires, for the Bush fires were out

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all along the ranges to the east, and, as night came on, lines and curves of lights—clear lights, white lights, and, in the nearer distance, red lights and smoky lights—marked the sidings and ridges of a western spur of the Blue Mountain Range, and seemed suspended against a dark sky, for the stars and the loom of the hills were hidden by smoke and drought haze.

There was a dance at Carey's. Old Carey was a cheerful, broad-minded Bushman, haunted at times by the memories of old days, when he was the beau of the Bush balls, and so, when he built his new slab-and-bark barn he had it properly floored with hard-wood, and the floor well-faced 'to give the young people a show when they wanted a dance,' he said. The floor had a spring in it, and Bush boys and girls often rode twenty miles and more to dance on that floor. The girls said it was a lovely floor.

On this occasion Carey had stacked his wheat outside until after the New Year. Spring carts, and men and girls on horseback came in from miles round. 'Sperm' candles had been cut up and thrown on the floor during the afternoon, and rubbed over by feet cased tightly in 'lastic sides; and hoops were hung horizontally from the tie-beams, with candles stuck round them. There were fresh-faced girls, and sweet, freckled-faced girls, and jolly girls, and shy girls —all sorts of girls except sulky, 'toney' girls—and lanky chaps, most of them sawny, and weird, whiskered agriculturists, who watched the dancers with old, old time-worn smiles, or stood, or sat on their heels yarning, with their pipes, outside, where two boilers were slung over a log-fire to boil water for tea; and there were leathery women, with complexions like dried apples, who gossiped—for the first time in months perhaps—and watched the young people, and thought at times, no doubt, of other days—of other days when they were girls. (And not so far distant either, in some cases, for women dry quickly in the Bush.)

And there were one or two old soldiers and their wives,

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whose eyes glistened when Jim Bullock played 'The Girl I Left Behind Me.'

Jim Bullock was there with his concertina. He sat on a stool in front of a bench, on which was a beer-keg, piles of teacups and saucers, several big tin teapots, and plates of sandwiches, sponge-cake, tarts, etc. Jim sat in his shirt-sleeves, with his flat-brimmed, wire-bound, 'hard-hitter' hat on, slanting over his weaker eye. He held one leg loosely and the other rigid, with the concertina on his knee, and swanked away at the instrument by the hour, staring straight in front of him with the expression of a cod-fish, and never moving a muscle except the muscles of his great hairy arms and big chapped and sun-blotched hands; while chaps in tight ''larstins' (elastic-side boots), slop suits of black, bound with braid, and with coats too short in the neck and arms, and trousers bell-mouthed at the bottoms, and some with paper collars, narrow red ribbon ties, or scarfs through walnut shells, held their partners rigidly, and went round the room with their eyes—most of them—cocked at the rafters in semi-idiotic ecstasy.

But there was tall, graceful, pink-and-white Bertha Buckolt, blue-eyed and blue-black-haired, and little Mary Carey with the kind, grey eyes and red-gold hair; there was Mary's wild brother Jim, with curly black hair and blue eyes and dimples of innocence; and there was Harry Dale, the drover, Jim's shearing and droving mate, a tall, good-looking, brown-eyed and brown-haired young fellow, a 'better-class' Bushman and the best dancer in the district. Uncle Abel usurped the position of M.C., and roared 'Now then! take yer partners!' and bawled instructions and interrupted and tangled up the dancers, until they got used to taking no notice of his bull voice. Mary Carey was too shy—because she loved him, and secretly and fondly hoped and doubted that he cared for her—to be seen dancing more than once with Harry Dale, so he shared Bertha Buckolt, the best girl dancer there, with Jim Carey,

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who danced with his sister when Harry was dancing with Bertha Buckolt, and who seemed, for some reason best known to himself, to be perfectly satisfied with the arrangement. Poor little Mary began to fret presently, and feel a little jealous of Bertha, her old schoolmate. She was little and couldn't dance like Bertha, and she couldn't help noticing how well Bertha looked to-night, and what a well-matched pair she and Harry made; and so, when twelve o'clock came and they all went outside to watch the Old Year out and the New Year in—with a big bonfire on the distant ridge where the grass fires had reached a stretch of dry scrub—and to join hands all round and sing 'Auld Lang Syne,' little Mary was not to be found, for she was sitting on a log round behind the cow-yard, crying softly to herself.

And when about three o'clock they all started home, Mary gave Bertha her cheek to kiss instead of her mouth, and that hurt Bertha, who had *her* cry riding home, to the astonishment and irritation of her brother Jack, who rode home with her.

But when they were all gone Mary was missing again, and when her mother called her, and, after a pause, the voice of Harry Dale said, respectfully, in the darkness, 'She's here, Mrs Carey, she's all right,' the two were discovered sitting on a convenient log of the wood-heap, with an awkward and over-acted interval of log between them.

Old Carey liked Harry Dale, and seemed very well satisfied with the way things appeared to be going. He pressed Harry to stay at the Selection overnight. 'The missus will make you a shakedown on the floor,' he said. Harry had no appointments, and stayed cheerfully, and old Carey, having had a whisky or two, insisted on Mary making the shakedown, and the old folks winked at each other behind the young folks' backs to see how poor little Mary spread a spare mattress, with red-hot, averted face,

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and found an extra pillow and a spare pair of ironed sheets for the shakedown.

At sunrise she stole out to milk the cows, which was her regular duty; there was no other way out from her room than through the dining-room, where Harry lay on his back, with his arms folded, resting peacefully. He seemed sound asleep and safe for a good two hours, so she ventured. As she passed out she paused a moment looking down on him with all the love-light in her eyes, and, obeying a sudden impulse, she stooped softly and touched his forehead with her lips, then she slipped out. Harry stretched, opened his eyes, winked solemnly at the ceiling, and then, after a decent interval, he got up, dressed, and went out to help her to milk.

. . . . . .

Harry Dale and Jim Carey were going out to take charge of a mob of bullocks going northwest, away up in Queensland, and as they had lost a day and night to be at the dance, they decided to start in the cool of the evening and travel all night. Mary walked from the homestead to the Lower Slip-rails between her brother, who rode—because he was her brother—and led a pack-horse on the other side, and Harry, who walked and led his horse—because he was her sweetheart, avowed only since last night.

There were thunder-storms about, and Mary had repented sufficiently with regard to Bertha Buckolt to wear on her shoulders a cape which Bertha had left behind last night.

When they reached the Lower Slip-rails Jim said he'd go on and that Harry needn't hurry: he stooped over his horse's neck, kissed his sister, promised to keep away from the drink, not to touch a card, and to leave off fighting, and rode on. And when he rounded the Spur he saw a tall, graceful figure slipping through the trees from the creek towards Buckolts' Gate.

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Then came the critical time at the Lower Slip-rails. The shadows from the setting sun lengthened quickly on the siding, and then the sun slipped out of sight over a 'saddle' in the ridges, and all was soon dusk save the sunlit peaks of the Blue Mountains away to the east over the sweeps of blue-grey bush.

'Ah, well! Mary,' said Harry, 'I must make a start now.'

'You'll—you'll look after Jim, won't you, Harry?' said Mary.

'I will, Mary, for your sake.'

Her mouth began to twitch, her chin to tremble, and her eyes brimmed suddenly.

'You must cheer up, Mary,' he said with her in his arms. 'I'll be back before you know where you are, and then we'll be married right off at once and settle down for life.'

She smiled bravely.

'Good-bye, Mary!'

'Good-bye, Harry!'

He led his horse through the rails and lifted them, with trembling hands, and shot them home. Another kiss across the top rail and he got on his horse. She mounted the lower rail, and he brought his horse close alongside the fence and stooped to kiss her again.

'Cheer up, Mary!' he said. 'I'll tell you what I'll do—when I come back I'll whistle when I reach the Spur and you be here to let the slip-rails down for me. I'll time myself to get here about sundown. I'll whistle "Willie Riley," so you'll know it's me. Good-bye, little girl! I must go now. Don't fret—the time will soon go by.'

He turned, swung his horse, and rode slowly down the track, turning now and again to wave his hand to her, with a farewell flourish of his hat as he rounded the Spur. His track, five hundred miles, or perhaps a thousand, into the great northwest; his time, six months, or perhaps a year.

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Hers a hundred yards or so back to the dusty, dreary drudgery of Selection life.

The daylight faded into starlight, the sidings grew very dim, and a faint white figure blurred against the bars of the slip-panel.

Act II

It was the last day of the threshing—shortly after New Year—at Rocky Rises. The green boughs, which had been lashed to the verandah posts on Christmas Eve, had withered and been used for firewood. The travelling steamer had gone with its gang of men and the family sat down to tea, the men tired with hard work and heat, and with prickly heat and irritating wheaten chaff and dust under their clothes—and with smut (for the crop had been a smutty one) 'up their brains' as Uncle Abel said—the women worn out with cooking for a big gang of shearers.

Good-humoured Aunt Emma—who was Uncle Abel's niece—recovered first, and started the conversation. There were one or two neighbours' wives who had lent crockery and had come over to help with the cooking in their turns. Jim Carey's name came up incidentally, but was quickly dropped, for ill reports of Jim had come home. Then Aunt Emma mentioned Harry Dale, and glanced meaningly at Mary, whose face flamed as she bent over her plate.

'Never mind, Mary,' said Aunt Emma, 'it's nothing to be ashamed of. We were all girls once. There's many a girl would jump at Harry.'

'Who says I'm ashamed?' said Mary, straightening up indignantly.

'Don't tease her, Emma,' said Mrs Carey, mildly.

'I'll tell yer what,' said young Tom Carey, frankly, 'Mary got a letter from him to-day. I seen her reading it behind the house.'

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Mary's face flamed again and went down over her plate.

'Mary,' said her mother, with sudden interest, 'did Harry say anything of Jim?'

'No, mother,' said Mary. 'And that's why I didn't tell you about the letter.'

There was a pause. Then Tommy said, with that delightful tact which usually characterises young Tommies,—

'Well, Mary needn't be so cocky about Harry Dale, anyhow. I seen him New Year's Eve when we had the dance. I seen him after the dance liftin' Bertha Buckolt onter her horse in the dark—as if she couldn't get on herself—she's big enough. I seen him lift her on, an' he took her right up an' lifted her right inter the saddle, 'stead of holdin' his hand for her to tread on like that newchum Jackeroo we had. An', what's more, I seen him hug her an' give her a kiss before he lifted her on. He told her he was as good as her brother.'

'What did he mean by that, Tommy?' asked Mrs Porter, to break an awkward pause.

'How'm I ter know what he means?' said Tommy, politely.

'And, Tommy, I seen Harry Dale give young Tommy Carey a lick with a strap the day before New Year's Eve for throwing his sister's cat into the dam,' said Aunt Emma, coming to poor Mary's rescue. 'Never mind, Mary, my dear, he said good-bye to you last.'

'No, HE DIDN'T!' roared Uncle Abel.

They were used to Uncle Abel's sudden bellowing, but it startled them this time.

"Why, Uncle Abel,' cried both Aunt Emma and Mrs Carey, 'whatever do you mean?'

'What I means is that I ain't agoin' to have the feelin's of a niece of mine trifled with. What I means is that I seen Harry Dale with Bertha Buckolt on New Year's night after he left here. That's what I means—'

'Don't speak so loud, Abel, we're not deaf,' interrupted

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Carey, as Mary started up white-faced. 'What do you want to always shout for?'

'I speak loud because I want people to hear me!!' roared Uncle Abel, turning on him.

'Go on, Uncle Abel,' said Mary, 'tell me what you mean.'

'I mean,' said Uncle Abel, lowering his voice a little, 'that I seen Harry Dale and Bertha Buckolt at Buckolts' Gate that night—I seen it all—'

'*At Buckolts'* Gate!' cried Mary.

'YES! at Buckolts' Gate! Ain't I speakin' loud enough?'

'And where were you?'

'Never mind wheers I was. I was comin' home along the ridges, and I seen them. I seen them say good-bye; I seen them hug an' kiss—'

'Uncle Abel!' exclaimed Aunt Emma.

'It's no use Uncle Abelin' me. What I sez I sez. I ain't agoin' to have a niece of mine bung-foodled—'

'Uncle Abel,' cried Mary, staring at him wild-eyed, 'do be careful what you say. You must have made a mistake. Are you sure it was Bertha and Harry?'

'Am I sure my head's on me neck?' roared Uncle Abel. 'Would I see 'em if I didn't see 'em? I tell you—'

'Now wait a moment, Uncle Abel,' interrupted Mary, with dangerous calmness. 'Listen to me. Harry Dale and I are engaged to be married, and—'

'Have you got the writin's!' shouted Uncle Abel.

'The *what?*' said Mary.

'The writin's.'

'No, of course not.'

'Then that's where you are,' said Uncle Abel, triumphantly. 'If you had the writin's you could sue him for breach of contract.'

Uncle Abel, who couldn't read, had no faith whatever in verbal agreements (he wouldn't sign one, he said), all others he referred to as 'writings.'

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'Now, listen to me, Uncle Abel,' said Mary, trembling now. 'Are you sure you saw Harry Dale and Bertha Buckolt at Buckolts' Gate after he left here that night?'

'Yes. An' what's more, I seen young Tommy there ridin' on his pony along by the Spur a little while after, an' he muster seen them too, if he's got a tongue.'

Mary turned quickly to her brother.

'Well, all I can say,' said Tommy, quietened now, 'is that I seen *her* at Buckolts' Gate that night. I was comin' home from Two-Mile Flat, and I met Jim with his pack-horse about a mile the other side of Buckolts, and while we was talkin' Harry Dale caught up, so I jist said "So-long" an' left 'em. And when I got to Buckolts' Gate I seen Bertha Buckolt. She was standin' under a tree, and she looked as if she was cryin'—'

But Mary got her bonnet and started out.

'Where are you going to, Mary?' asked her mother, starting up nervously.

'I'm going across to Buckolts' to find out the truth,' said Mary, and she went out.

'Better let her go, Lizzie,' said Aunt Emma, detaining her sister. 'You've done it now, Uncle Abel.'

'Well, why didn't she get the writin's?' retorted Uncle Abel.

Half-way to Buckolts' Mary met Bertha Buckolt herself, coming over to the Selection for the first since the night of the party. Bertha started forward to kiss Mary, but stopped short as Mary stood stock-still and faced her, with her hands behind her back.

'Why! whatever is the matter, Mary?' exclaimed Bertha.

'You know very well, Bertha.'

'Why! whatever do you mean? What have I done?'

'What haven't you done? You've—you've broken my heart.'

'Good gracious me! Whatever are you talking about? Tell me what it is, Mary?'

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'You met him at your gate that night?'

'I know I did.'

'Oh, Bertha! How could you be so mean and deceitful?'

'Mean and deceitful! What do you mean by that? Whatever are you talking about? I suppose I've got as good a right to meet him as anyone else.'

'No, you haven't,' retorted Mary, 'you're only stringing him on. You only did it to spite me. You helped him to deceive me. You ought to be ashamed to look me in the face.'

'Good gracious! Whatever are you talking about? Ain't I good enough for him? I ought to be, God knows! I suppose he can marry who he likes, and if I'm poor fool enough to love him and marry him, what then? Mary, you ought to be the last to speak—speak to—to me like that.

'Yes. He can marry all the girls in the country for all I care. I never want to see either him or you any more. You're a cruel, deceitful, brazen-faced hussy, and he's a heartless, deceiving blackguard.'

'Mary! I believe you're mad,' said Bertha, firmly. 'How dare you speak to me like that? And as for him being a blackguard. Why, you ought to be the last in the world to say such a thing; you ought to be the last to say a word against him. Why, I don't believe you ever cared a rap for him in spite of all your pretence. He could go to the devil for all you cared.'

'That's enough, Bertha Buckolt!' cried Mary. '*You* —you! Why, you're a barefaced girl, that's what you are! I don't want to see your brazen face again.' With that she turned and stumbled blindly in the direction of home.

'Send back my cape,' cried Bertha as she too turned away.

Mary walked wildly home and fled to her room and locked the door. Bertha did likewise.

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Mary let Aunt Emma in after a while, ceased sobbing and allowed herself to be comforted a little. Next morning she was out milking at the usual time, but there were dark hollows under her eyes, and her little face was white and set. After breakfast she rolled the cape up very tight in a brown-paper parcel, addressed it severely to—

'Miss Bertha Buckolt,
Eurunderee Creek,'

and sent it home by one of the school-children.

She wrote to Harry Dale and told him that she knew all about it (not stating what), but she forgave him and hoped he'd be happy. She never wanted to see his face again, and enclosed his portrait.

Harry, who was as true and straight as a Bushman could be, puzzled it out and decided that some one of his old love affairs must have come to Mary's ears, and wrote demanding an explanation.

She never answered that letter.

Act III.

It was Christmas Day at Rocky Rises. The plum-puddings had been made, as usual, weeks beforehand, and hung in rags to the tie-beams and taken down and boiled again. Poultry had been killed and plucked and cooked, and all the toil had been gone through, and every preparation made for a red-hot dinner on a blazing hot day —and for no other reason than that our great-grandmothers used to do it in a cold climate at Christmas-times that came in mid-winter. Merry men hadn't gone forth to the wood to gather in the mistletoe (if they ever did in England, in the olden days, instead of sending shivering, wretched vassals in rags to do it); but Uncle

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Abel had gone gloomily up the ridge on Christmas Eve, with an axe on his shoulder (and Tommy unwillingly in tow, scowling and making faces behind his back), and had cut young pines and dragged them home and lashed them firmly to the verandah posts, which was the custom out there.

There was little good-will or peace between the three or four farms round Rocky Rises that Christmas Day, and Uncle Abel had been the cause of most of the ill-feeling, though they didn't know, and he was least aware of it of any.

It all came about in this way:—

. . . . . .

Shortly after last New Year Ryan's bull had broken loose and gone astray for two days and nights, breaking into neighbours' paddocks and filling himself with hay and damaging other bulls, and making love by night and hiding in the scrub all day. On the second night he broke through and jumped over Reid's fences, and destroyed about an acre of grape vines and adulterated Reid's stock, besides interfering with certain heifers which were not of a marriageable age. There was a £5 penalty on a stray bull. Reid impounded the bull and claimed heavy damages. Ryan, a small selector of little account, was always pulling some neighbour to court when he wasn't being 'pulled' himself, so he went to court over this case.

Now, it appears that the bull, on his holiday, had spent a part of the first night in Carey's lower paddock, and Uncle Abel (who was out mooching about the Bush at all hours, 'havin' a look at some timber' or some 'indercations' (of gold), or on some mysterious business or fad, the mystery of which was of his own making)—Uncle Abel saw the bull in the paddock at daylight and turned it out the slip-rails, and talked about it afterwards, referring to the slip-rails as 'Buckolts' Gate,' of course,

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and spoke mysteriously of the case, and put on an appearance of great importance, and allowed people to get an idea that he knew a lot if he only liked to speak; and finally he got himself 'brought up' as a witness for Ryan.

He had a lot of beer in town before he went to the Court-house. All he knew would have been of no use to either party, but he swore that he had seen Ryan's bull inside Buckolts' Gate at daylight (on the day which wasn't in question) and had turned him out. Uncle Abel mixed up the Court a good deal, and roared like the bull, and became more obstinate the more he was cross-examined, and narrowly escaped being committed for contempt of court.

Ryan, who had a high opinion of the breed of his bull, got an idea that the Buckolts had enticed or driven the bull into their paddock for stock-raising purposes, instead of borrowing it honestly or offering to pay for the use of it. Then Ryan wanted to know why Abel had driven his bull out of Buckolts' Gate, and the Buckolts wanted to know what business Abel Albury had to drive Ryan's bull out of their paddock, if the bull had really ever been there. And so it went on till Rocky Rises was ripe for a tragedy.

The breach between the Careys and the Buckolts was widened, the quarrel between Ryan and Reid intensified. Ryan got a down on the Careys because he reckoned that Uncle Abel had deliberately spoilt his case with his evidence; and the Reids and Careys were no longer on speaking terms, because nothing would convince old Reid that Abel hadn't tried to prove that Ryan's bull had never been in Reid's paddock at all.

. . . . . .

Well, it was Christmas Day, and the Carey family and Aunt Emma sat down to dinner. Jim was present, having arrived over night, with no money, as usual, and suffering a recovery. The elder brother, Bob (who had a selection-

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up country), and his wife were there. Mrs Carey moved round with watchful eyes and jealous ears, lest there should be a word or a look which might hurt the feelings of her wild son—for of such are mothers.

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Dinner went on very moodily, in spite of Aunt Emma, until at last Jim spoke—almost for the first time, save for a long-whispered and, on his part, repentant conversation with his mother.

'Look here, Bertha!' said Jim. 'What did you throw Harry Dale over for?'

'Don't ask me, Jim.'

'Rot! What did he do to you? I'm your brother' (with a glance at Bob), 'and I ought to know.

'Well, then, ask Bertha Buckolt. She saw him last.'

'What!' cried Jim.

'Hold your tongue, Jim! You'll make her cry,' said Aunt Emma.

'Well, what's it all about, anyway?' demanded Jim. 'All I know is that Mary wrote to Harry and threw him over, and he ain't been the same man since. He swears he'll never come near the district again.'

'Tell Jim, Aunt Emma,' said Mary. And Aunt Emma started to tell the story as far as she knew.

'Saw her at Buckolts' slip-rails!' cried Jim, starting up. 'Well, he couldn't have had time to more than say good-bye to her, for I was with her there myself, and Harry caught up to me within a mile of the gate—and I rode pretty fast.'

'He had a jolly long good-bye with her,' shouted Uncle Abel. 'Look here, Jim! I ain't goin' to stand by and see a nephew of mine bung-foodled by no girl; an', I tell you, I seen 'em huggin' and kissin' and canoodlin' for half-an-hour at Buckolts' Gate!'

'It's a—a— Look here, Uncle Abel, be careful what you say. You've got the bull by the tail again, that's what

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it is!' Jim's face grew whiter—and it had been white enough on account of the drink. 'How did you know it was them? You're always mistaking people. It might have been someone else.'

'I know Harry Dale on horseback two miles off!' roared Uncle Abel. 'And I knowed her by her cape.'

It was Mary's turn to gasp and stare at Uncle Abel.

'Uncle Abel,' she managed to say — 'Uncle Abel! Wasn't it at our Lower Slip-rails you saw them and not Buckolts' Gate?'

'Well!' bellowed Uncle Abel. 'You might call 'em the "Lower Slip-rails," but I calls 'em Buckolts' Gate! They lead to'r'ds Buckolts', don't they? Hey? Them other slip-rails'—jerking his arms in the direction of the upper paddock — 'them theer other slip-rails that leads outer Reid's lane I calls *Reid's* Slip-rails. I don't know nothing about no upper or lower, or easter or wester, or any other la-di-dah names you like to call 'em.'

'Oh, uncle,' cried Mary, trembling like a leaf, 'why didn't you explain this before? Why didn't you tell us?'

'What cause have I got to tell any of you everything I sez or does or thinks? It 'ud take me all me time. Ain't you got any more brains than Ryan's bull, any of you? Hey!—You've got heads, but so has cabbages. Explain! Why, if the world wasn't stuffed so full of jumped-up fools there'd be never no need for explainin'.'

Mary left the table.

'What is it, Mary?' cried Aunt Emma.

'I'm going across to Bertha,' said Mary, putting on her hat with trembling hands. 'It was me Uncle Abel saw. I had Bertha's cape on that night.'

'Oh, Uncle Abel,' cried Aunt Emma, 'whatever have you done?'

'Well,' said Uncle Abel, 'why didn't she get the writin's as I told her? It's to be hoped she won't make such a fool of herself next time.'

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Half an hour later, or thereabouts, Mary sat on Bertha Buckolt's bed, with Bertha beside her and Bertha's arm round her, and they were crying and laughing by turns.

'But—but—why didn't you *tell* me it was Jim?' said Mary.

'Why didn't you tell me it was Jack, Mary?' asked Bertha. 'It would have saved all this year of misery.'

'I didn't see Harry Dale at all that night,' said Bertha. 'I was—I was crying when Jim left me, and when Harry came along I slipped behind a tree until he was past. And now, look here, Mary, I can't marry Jim until he steadies down, but I'll give him another chance. But, Mary, I'd sooner lose him than you.'

. . . . . .

Bertha walked home with Mary, and during the afternoon she took Jim aside and said,—

'Look here, Jim, I'll give you another chance—for a year. Now I want you to ride into town and send a telegram to Harry Dale. How long would it take him to get here?'

'He couldn't get here before New Year,' said Jim.

'That will do,' said Mary, and Jim went to catch his horse.

Next day Harry's reply came—'Coming.'

Act IV

New Year's Eve. The dance was at Buckolts' this year, but Bertha didn't dance much; she was down by the gate most of the time with little Mary Carey, waiting, and watching the long, white road, and listening for horses' feet, and disappointed often as other horsemen rode by or turned up to the farm.

And in the hot sunrise that morning, within a hundred

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miles of Rocky Rises, a tired, dusty drover camped in the edge of a scrub, boiled his quart-pot, broiled a piece of mutton on the coals, and lay down on the sand to rest an hour or so before pushing on to a cattle-station he knew to try and borrow fresh horses. He had ridden all night.

Old Buckolt and Carey and Reid smoked socially under the grape vines, with bottles of whisky and glasses, and nudged each other and coughed when they wanted to laugh at Old Abel Albury, who was, for about the first time in his life, condescending to explain. He was explaining to them what thund'rin' fools they had been.

Later on they sent a boy on horseback with a bottle of whisky and a message to Ryan, who turned up in time to see the New Year in with them and contradict certain slanders concerning the breed of his bull.

. . . . . .

Meanwhile Bertha comforted Mary, and at last persuaded her to go home. 'He's sure to be here to-morrow, Mary,' she said, 'and you need to look fresh and happy.'

But Mary didn't sleep that night; she was up before daylight, had the kettle on and some chops ready to fry, and at daybreak she was down by the slip-rails again. She was turning away for the second time when she heard a clear whistle round the Spur—then the tune of 'Willie Riley,' and the hobble-chains and camp-ware on the pack-horse jingling to the tune.

She pulled out the rails with eager, trembling hands and leaned against the tree.

. . . . . .

An hour later a tired drover lay on his back, in his ragged, track-worn clothes and dusty leggings, on Mary's own little bed in the skillion off the living-room, and rested. Mary bustled round getting breakfast ready, and singing softly to herself; once she slipped in, bent over Harry and kissed him gently on the lips, and ran out as he stirred.

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'Why, who's that?' exclaimed Uncle Abel, poking round early and catching a glimpse of Harry through the open door.

'It's only Harry, Uncle Abel,' said Mary.

Uncle Abel peered in again to make sure.

'Well, be sure you git the writin's this time,' he said.

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'KNOCKING AROUND'

WEARY old wife, with the bucket and cow,
'How's your son Jack? and where is he now?'
Haggard old eyes that turn to the west—
'Boys will be boys, and he's gone with the rest!'
Grief without tears and grief without sound;
'Somewhere up-country he's knocking around.'

Knocking around with a vagabond crew;
Does for himself what a mother would do.
Maybe in trouble and maybe hard-up,
Maybe in want of a bite or a sup;
Dead of the fever, or lost in the drought,
Lonely old mother! he's knocking about.

Wiry old man at the tail of the plough,
'Heard of Jack lately and where is he now?'
Pauses a moment his forehead to wipe,
Drops the rope rein while he feels for his pipe,
Scratches his grey head in sorrow or doubt;
'Somewheers or others he's knocking about.'

Knocking about on the runs of the West,
Holding his own with the worst and the best,
Breaking in horses and risking his neck,
Droving or shearing and making a cheque;
Straight as a sapling—six-foot and sound,
Jack is all right when he's knocking around.

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THE BUSH FIRE

I.—SQUATTER AND SELECTOR

WALL was a squatter and a hard man. There had been long years of drought and loss, and then came the rabbit pest—the rabbits swarmed like flies over his run, and cropped the ground bare where even the poor grass might have saved thousands of sheep—and the rabbits cost the squatter hundred of pounds in 'rabbit-proof' fences, trappers' wages, etc., just to keep them down. Then came arrangements with the bank. And then Wall's wife died. Wall started to brood over other days, and the days that had gone between, and developed a temper which drove his children from home one by one, till only Mary was left. She managed the lonely home with the help of a half-caste. Then in good seasons came the selectors.

Men remembered Wall as a grand boss and a good fellow, but that was in the days before rabbits and banks, and syndicates and 'pastoralists,' or pastoral companies instead of good squatters.

Runs were mostly pastoral leases for which the squatter paid the Government so much per square mile (almost a nominal rent). Selections were small holdings taken up by farmers under residential and other conditions, and paid for by instalments. If you were not ruined by the drought, and paid up long enough, the land became freehold. The writer is heir to a dusty patch of 300 acres or so in the

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scrub which was taken up thirty years ago and isn't freehold yet.

Selectors were allowed to take up land on runs or pastoral leases as well as on unoccupied Crown lands, and as they secured the best bits of land, and on water frontages if they could, and as, of course, selections reduced the area of the run, the squatters loved selectors like elder brothers. One man is allowed to select only a certain amount of land, and required by law to live on it, so the squatters bought as much freehold about the homestead as they could afford, selected as much as they are allowed to by law, and sometimes employed 'dummy' selectors to take up choice bits about the runs and hold them for them. They fought selectors in many various ways, and, in some cases, annoyed and persecuted them with devilish ingenuity.

Ross was a selector, and a very hard man physically. He was a short, nuggety man with black hair and frill beard (a little dusty), bushy black eyebrows, piercing black eyes, horny knotted hands, and the obstinacy or pluck of a dozen men to fight drought and the squatter. Ross selected on Wall's run, in a bend of Sandy Creek, a nice bit of land with a black soil, flat and red soil sidings from the ridges, which no one had noticed before, and with the help of his boys he got the land cleared and fenced in a year or two—taking Bush contracts about the district between whiles to make 'tucker' for the family until he got his first crop off.

Wall was never accused of employing dummies, or underhanded methods in dealings with selectors, but he had been through so much and had brooded so long that he had grown very hard and bitter and suspicious, and the reverse of generous—as many men do who start out in life too soft and good-hearted and with too much faith in human nature. He was a tall, dark man. He ordered Ross's boys off the run, impounded Ross's stock—before

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Ross had got his fencing finished, summoned Ross for trespass, and Ross retaliated as well as he could, until at last it mightn't have been safe for one of those men to have met the other with a gun. The impounding of the selector's cattle led to the last bad quarrel between Wall and his son Billy, who was a tall, good-natured Cornstalk, and who reckoned that Australia was big enough for all of us. One day in the drought, and in an extra bitter mood, Wall heard that some of his sheep had been dogged in the vicinity of Ross's selection, and he ordered Billy to take a station-hand and watch Ross's place all night, and, if Ross's cattle put their noses over the boundary, to drive them to the pound, fifteen miles away; also to lay poisoned baits for the dogs all round the selection. And Billy flatly refused.

'I know Ross and the boys,' he said, 'and I don't believe they dogged the sheep. Why, they've only got a Newfoundland pup and an old lame, one-eyed sheep-dog that couldn't hurt a flea. Now, father, this sort of thing has been going on long enough. What difference does a few paltry acres make to us? The country is big enough, God knows! Ross is a straight man and—for God's sake, give the man a chance to get his ground fenced in; he's doing it as fast as he can, and he can't watch his cattle day and night.'

'Are you going to do as I tell you, or are you not?' shouted Wall.

'Well, if it comes to that, I'm not,' said Billy. 'I'm not going to sneak round a place all night and watch for a chance to 'pound a poor man's cows.'

It was an awful row, down behind the wool shed, and things looked so bad that old Peter, the station-hand, who was a witness, took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves, ready, as he said afterwards, 'to roll into' either the father or the son if one raised a hand against the other.

'Father!' said Billy, though rather sobered by the sight

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of his father's trembling, choking passion, 'do you cal yourself an Englishman?'

'Yes!' yelled Wall, furiously. 'What the hell do you call yourself?'

'If it comes to that I'm an Australian,' said Billy, and he turned away and went to catch his horse. He went up country and knocked about in the North-West for a year or two.

II.—ROMEO AND JULIET

Mary Wall was twenty-five. She was an Australian Bush girl every inch of her five-foot-nine; she had a pink-and-white complexion, dark blue eyes, blue-black hair and 'the finest figure in the district,' on horseback or afoot. She was the best girl-rider too (saddle or bare-back), and they say that when she was a tomboy she used to tuck her petticoats under her and gallop man-fashion through the scrub after horses or cattle. She said she was going to be an old maid.

There came a Jackeroo on a visit to the station. He was related to the bank with which Wall had relations. He was a dude, with an expensive education and no brains. He was very vain of his education and prospects. He regarded Mary with undisguised admiration, and her father had secret hopes. One evening the Jackeroo was down by the homestead-gate when Mary came cantering home on her tall chestnut. The gate was six feet or more, and the Jackeroo raised his hat and hastened to open it, but Mary reined her horse back a few yards and the 'dood' had barely time to jump aside when there was a scuffle of hoofs on the road, a 'Ha-ha-ha!' in mid-air, a landing thud, and the girl was away up the home-track in a cloud of dust.

A few days later the Jackeroo happened to be at Kelly's, a wayside shanty, watching a fight between two Bushmen, when Mary rode up. She knew the men. She whipped

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her horse in between them and struck at first one and then the other with her riding-whip.

'You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!' she said; 'and both married men, too!'

It evidently struck them that way, for after a bit they shook hands and went home.

'And I wouldn't have married that girl for a thousand pounds,' said the Jackeroo, relating the incidents to some friends in Sydney.

Mary said she wanted a man, if she could get one.

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There was no life at home nowadays, so Mary went to all the Bush dances in the district. She thought nothing of riding twenty or thirty miles to a dance, dancing all night, and riding home again next morning. At one of these dances she met young Robert Ross, a clean-limbed, good-looking young fellow about her own age. She danced with him and liked him, and danced with him again, and he rode part of the way home with her. The subject of the quarrel between the two homes came up gradually.

'The boss,' said Robert, meaning his father, 'the boss is always ready to let bygones be bygones. It's a pity it couldn't be fixed up.'

'Yes,' said Mary, looking at him (Bob looked very well on horseback), 'it is a pity.'

They met several times, and next Prince of Wales's birthday they rode home from the races together. Both had good horses, and they happened to be far ahead of the others on the wide, straight clear road that ran between the walls of the scrub. Along, about dusk, they became very confidential indeed—Mary had remarked what a sad and beautiful sunset it was. The horses got confidential, too, and shouldered together, and touched noses, and, after a long interval in the conversation, during which Robert, for one, began to breathe quickly, he suddenly leaned over, put his arm round her waist and made to kiss her. She

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jerked her body away, threw up her whip-hand, and Robert ducked instinctively; but she brought the whip down on her horse's flank instead, and raced ahead. Robert followed —or, rather, his horse did: he thought it was a race, and took the bit in his teeth. Robert kept calling, appealing,—

'Wait a while, Mary! I want to explain! I want to apologise! For God's sake listen to me, Mary!'

But Mary didn't hear him. Perhaps she misunderstood the reason of the chase and gave him credit for a spice of the devil in his nature. But Robert grew really desperate; he felt that the thing must be fixed up now or never, and gave his horse a free rein. Her horse was the fastest, and Robert galloped in the dust from his heels for about a mile and a half; then at the foot of a rise Mary's horse stumbled and nearly threw her over his head, and then he stopped like the good horse he was.

Robert got down feeling instinctively that he might best make his peace on foot, and approached Mary with a face of misery—she had dropped her whip.

'Oh, Bob!' she said, 'I'm knocked out;' and she slipped down into his arms and stayed there a while.

They sat on a log and rested, while their horses made inquiries of each other's noses, and compared notes.

And after a good while Mary said,—

'No, Bob, it's no use talking of marrying just yet. I like you, Bob, but I could never marry you while things are as they are between your father and mine. Now, that'll do. Let me get on my horse, Bob. I'll be safer there.'

'Why?' asked Bob.

'Come on, Bob, and don't be stupid.'

She met him often and 'liked' him.

III.—A TRAMP'S MATCH AND WHAT IT DID

It was Christmas Eve at Wall's but there was no score or so of buggies and horses and dozens of strange dogs

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round the place as of old. The glasses and decanters were dusty on the heavy old-fashioned sideboard in the dining-room; and there was only a sullen, brooding man leaning over the hurdles and looking at his rams in the yard, and a sullen, brooding half-caste at work in the kitchen. Mary had ridden away that morning to visit a girl chum.

It was towards the end of a long drought, and the country was like tinder for hundreds of miles round—the ground for miles and miles in the broiling scrubs 'as bare as your hand,' or covered with coarse, dry tufts. There was feed grass in places, but you had to look close to see it.

Shearing had finished the day before, but there was a black boy and a station hand or two about the yards and six or eight shearers and rouseabouts, and a teamster camped in the men's huts—they were staying over the holidays to shear stragglers and clean up generally. Old Peter and a Jackeroo were out on the run watching a bush fire across Sandy Creek.

A swagman had happened to call at the station that morning; he asked for work and then for tucker. He irritated Wall, who told him to clear out. It was the first time that a swagman had been turned away from the station without tucker.

Swaggy went along the track some miles, brooding over his wrongs, and crossed Sandy Creek. He struck a match and dropped it into a convenient tuft of grass in a likely patch of tufts, with dead grass running from it up into the scrubby ridges—then he hurried on.

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Did you ever see a bush fire? Not sheets of flame sweeping and roaring from tree-top to tree-top, but the snaky, hissing grass fire of hard-wood country.

The whole country covered with thin blue smoke so that you never know in what direction the fire is travelling. At night you see it like the lighted streets of cities, in the distant ranges. It roars up the hollows of dead trees and

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gives them the appearance of factory chimneys in the dusk. It climbs, by shreds of bark, the trunks of old dead white-box and blue-gums—solid and hard as cast-iron—and cuts off the limbs. And where there's a piece of recently ring-barked country, with the dead leaves still on the trees, the fire will roar from bough to bough—a fair imitation of a soft-wood forest fire. The bush fire travels through the scrubs for hundreds of miles, taking the grass to the roots, scorching the living bush but leaving it alive—for gumbush is hardest of any to kill. Where there is no undergrowth, and the country seems bare as a road for miles, the fire will cross, licking up invisible straws of grass, dusty leaves, twigs and shreds of bark on the hard ground already baking in the drought. You hear of a fire miles away, and next day, riding across the head of a gully, you hear a hissing and crackling and there is the fire running over the ground in lines and curves of thin blue smoke, snakelike, with old logs blazing on the blackened ground behind. Did you ever *hear* a fire where a fire should not be? There is something hellish in the sound of it. When the breeze is, say, from the east the fire runs round western spurs, up sheltered gullies—helped by an 'eddy' in the wind perhaps—and appears along the top of the ridge, ready, with a change in the wind, to come down on farms and fields of ripe wheat, with a 'front' miles long.

A selector might be protected by a wide sandy creek in front and wide cleared roads behind, and, any hour in the day or night, a shout from the further end of the wheat paddock, and—'Oh, my God! the wheat!'

Wall didn't mind this fire much; most of his sheep were on their way out-back, to a back run where there was young grass; and the dry ridges along the creek would be better for a burning off—only he had to watch his fences.

But, about dusk, Mary came galloping home in her usual break-neck fashion.

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'Father,' she cried, 'turn out the men and send them at once. The fire is all down by Ross's farm, and he has ten acres of wheat standing, and no one at home but him and Bob.'

'How do you know?' growled Wall. Then suddenly and suspiciously, 'Have you been there?'

'I came home that way.'

'Well—let Ross look after his own,' snarled the father.

'But he can't, father. They're fighting the fire now, and they'll be burnt out before the morning if they don't get help—for God's sake, father, act like a Christian and send the men. Remember it is Christmas time, father. You're surely not going to see a neighbour burnt out.'

'Yes, I am,' shouted Wall. 'I'd like to see every selector in the country burnt out, hut and all! Get off that horse and go inside. If a man leaves the station to-night he needn't come back.' (This last for the benefit of the men's hut.)

'But, father—'

'Get off that horse and go inside,' roared Wall.

'I—I won't.'

'What!' He darted forward as though to drag her from the saddle, but she swung her horse away.

'Stop! Where are you going?'

'To help Ross,' said Mary. 'He had no one to send for help.'

'Then go the same way as your brother!' roared her father; 'and if you show your nose back again I'll horse-whip you off the run!'

'I'll go, father,' said Mary, and she was away.

IV.—THE FIRE AT ROSS'S FARM

Ross's farm was in a corner between the ridges and the creek. The fire had come down from the creek, but the siding on that side was fairly clear, and they had stopped

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the fire there. It went behind the ridge and ran up and over. The ridge was covered thickly with scrub and dead grass; the wheat-field went well up the siding, and along the top was a bush face with only a narrow bridle-track between it and the long dead grass. Everything depended on the wind. Mary saw Ross and Mrs Ross and the daughter Jenny, well up the siding above the fence, working desperately, running to and fro, and beating out the fire with green boughs. Mary left her horse, ran into the hut, and looked hurriedly round for something to wear in place of her riding-skirt. She only saw a couple of light print dresses. She stepped into a skillion room, which happened to be Bob's room, and there caught sight of a pair of trousers and a coat hanging on the wall.

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Bob Ross, beating desperately along a line of fire that curved down-hill to his right, and half choked and blinded with the smoke, almost stumbled against a figure which was too tall to be his father.

'Why! who's that?' he gasped.

'It's only me, Bob,' said Mary, and she lifted her bough again.

Bob stared. He was so astonished that he almost forgot the fire and the wheat. Bob was not thin—but—

'Don't look at me, Bob!' said Mary, hurriedly. 'We're going to be married, so it doesn't matter. Let us save the wheat.'

There was no time to waste; there was a breeze now from over the ridges, light, but enough to bear the fire down on them. Once, when they had breathing space, Mary ran to the creek for a billy of water. They beat out the fire all along the siding to where a rib of granite came down over the ridge to the fence, and then they thought the wheat was safe. They came together here, and Ross had time to look and see who the strange man was; then he stared at Mary from under his black, bushy eyebrows.

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Mary, choking and getting her breath after her exertions, suddenly became aware, said 'Oh!' and fled round the track beyond the point of granite. She felt a gust of wind and looked up the ridge. The bush fence ended here in a corner, where it was met by a new wire fence running up from the creek. It was a blind gully full of tall dead grass, and, glancing up, Mary saw the flames coming down fast. She ran back.

'Come on!' she cried, 'come on! The fire's the other side of the rocks!'

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Back at the station, Wall walked up and down till he cooled. He went inside and sat down, but it was no use. He lifted his head and saw his dead wife's portrait on the wall. Perhaps his whole life ran before him in detail—but this is not a psychological study.

There were only two tracks open to him now: either to give in, or go on as he was going—to shut himself out from human nature and become known as 'Mean Wall,' 'Hungry Wall,' or 'Mad Wall, the Squatter.' He was a tall, dark man of strong imagination and more than ordinary intelligence. And it was the great crisis of his ruined life. He walked to the top of a knoll near the homestead and saw the fire on the ridges above Ross's farm. As he turned back he saw a horseman ride up and dismount by the yard.

'Is that you, Peter?'

'Yes, boss. The fences is all right.'

'Been near Ross's?'

'No. He's burnt out by this time if he ain't.'

Wall walked to and fro for a few minutes longer. Then he suddenly stopped and called 'Peter!'

'Ay, ay!' from the direction of the huts.

'Turn out the men!' and Wall went into a shed and came out with his saddle on his arm.

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The fire rushed down the blind gully. Showers of sparks fell on the bush fence, it caught twice, and they put it out, but the third time it blazed and roared and a fire-engine could not have stopped it.

'The wheat must go,' said Ross. 'We've done our best,' and he threw down the blackened bough and leaned against a tree, and covered his eyes with a grimy hand.

The wheat was patchy in that corner—there were many old stumps of trees, and there were bare strips where the plough had gone on each side of them. Mary saw a chance, and climbed the fence.

'Come on, Bob,' she cried, 'we might save it yet. Mr Ross, pull out the fence along there,' and she indicated a point beyond the fire. They tramped down and tore up the wheat where it ran between the stumps—the fire was hissing and crackling round and through it, and just as it ran past them in one place when was a shout, a clatter of horses' hoofs on the stones, and Mary saw her father riding up the track with a dozen men behind him. She gave a shriek and ran straight down, through the middle of the wheat, towards the hut.

Wall and his men jumped to the ground, wrenched green boughs from the saplings, and, after twenty minutes' hard fighting, the crop was saved—save for a patchy acre or so.

When it was all over Ross sat down on a log and rested his head on his hands, and his shoulders shook.

Presently he felt a hand on his shoulder, looked up, and saw Wall.

'Shake hands Ross,' he said.

And it was Christmas Day.

. . . . . .

But in after years they used to nearly chaff the life out of Mary. 'You were in a great hurry to put on the breeches, weren't you, Mary?' 'Bob's best Sunday-go-meetin's too wasn't they, Mary?' 'Rather tight fit, wasn't they, Mary?'

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'Couldn't get 'em on now, could you, Mary?' etc., etc.

'But,' reflected old Peter apart to some cronies, 'it ain't every young chap as gits an idea of the shape of his wife afore he marries her—is it? An' that's sayin' somethin'.'

And old Peter was set down as being an innercent sort of ole cove.

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THE BUSH GIRL

SO you rode from the range where your brothers select,[1]
Through the ghostly, grey Bush in the dawn—
You rode slowly at first, lest her heart should suspect
That you were so glad to be gone;
You had scarcely the courage to glance back at her
By the homestead receding from view,
And you breathed with relief as you rounded the spur,
For the world was a wide world to you.

Grey eyes that grow sadder than sunset or rain,
Fond heart that is ever more true,
Firm faith that grows firmer for watching in vain—
She'll wait by the slip-rails for you.

Ah! the world is a new and a wide one to you,
But the world to your sweetheart is shut,
For a change never comes to the lonely Bush home
Of the stockyard, the scrub, and the hut;
And the only relief from its dulness she feels
When the ridges grow softened and dim,
And away in the dusk to the slip-rail she steals
To dream of past hours 'with him.'

Do you think, where, in place of bare fences, dry creeks,
Clear streams and green hedges are seen—
Where the girls have the lily and rose in their cheeks,
And the grass in mid-summer is green—

[1] Select'—to take up land for farming purposes.

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Do you think, now and then, now or then, in the whirl
Of the town life, while London is new,
Of the hut in the Bush and the freckled-faced girl
Who waits by the slip-rails for you?

Grey eyes that are sadder than sunset or rain,
Bruised heart that is ever more true,
Fond faith that is firmer for trusting in vain—
She waits by the slip-rails for you.

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THE HOUSE THAT WAS NEVER BUILT

THERE had been heavy rain and landslips all along the branch railway which left the Great Western line from Sydney just beyond the Blue Mountains, and ran through thick bush and scrubby ridgy country and along great alluvial sidings—where the hills on the opposite side of the wide valleys (misty in depths) faded from deep blue into the pale azure of the sky—and over the ends of western spurs to the little farming, mining and pastoral town of Solong, situated in a circle of blue hills on the banks of the willow-fringed Cudgegong River.

The line was hopelessly blocked, and some publicans at Solong had put on the old coach-road a couple of buggies, a waggonette, and an old mailcoach—relic of the days of Cob & Co., which had been resurrected from some back-yard and tinkered up—to bring the train passengers on from the first break in the line over the remaining distance of forty miles or so. Capertee Station (old time, 'Capertee Camp'—a teamster's camp)was the last station before the first washout, and there the railway line and the old road parted company for the last time before reaching Solong—the one to run round by the ends of the western spurs that spread fanlike, and the other to go through and over the rough country.

The train reached Capertee about midnight in broad moonlight that was misty in the valleys and round the blue of Crown Ridge. I got a 'box-seat' beside the driver on

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the old coach. It was a grand old road—one of the old main coach-roads of New South Wales—broad and white, metalled nearly all the way, and in nearly as good condition as on the day when the first passenger train ran into Solong and the last-used section of the old road was abandoned. It dated back to the bushranging days—right back to convict times: it ran through tall dark bush, up over gaps or 'saddles' in high ridges, down across deep dark gullies, and here and there across grey, marshy, curlew-haunted flats. Cob & Co.'s coach-and-six, with 'Royal Mail' gilded on the panels, had dashed over it in ten and twelve-mile stages in the old days, the three head-lamps flashing on the wild dark Bush at night, and maybe twenty-four passengers on board. The biggest rushes to richest gold-fields in the West had gone over this old road on coaches, on carts, on drays, on horse and bullock waggons, on horseback, and on foot; new chums from all the world and from all stations in life.

> 'When many a step was on the mountains,
> Marching West to the land of gold.'

And a few came back rich—red, round-faced and jolly—on the box-seat of Cob & Co.'s, treating the driver and all hands, 'going home' to sweethearts or families. (Home people will never feel the meaning of those two words, 'going home,' as it is felt in a new land.) And many came back broken men, tramping in rags, and carrying their swags through the dusty heat of the drought in December or the bitter, pelting rain in the mountains in June. Some came back grey who went as boys; and there were many who never came back.

I remembered the old mile-trees, with a section of bark cut away and the distances cut in Roman letters in the hardened sap—the distance from Bowen Fells, the railway terminus then. It was a ghostly old road, and if it wasn't haunted it should have been. There was an old decaying

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and nearly deserted coaching town or two; there were abandoned farms and half-way inns, built of stone, with the roofs gone and nettles growing high between the walls; the remains of an orchard here and there—a few gnarled quince trees—and the Bush reclaiming its own again. It was a haunted ride for me, because I had last ridden over this old road long ago when I was young—going to see the city for the first time—and because I was now on my way to attend the funeral of one of my father's blood from whom I had parted in anger.

We slowly climbed, and almost as slowly descended, the steep siding of a great hill called Aaron's Pass, and about a mile beyond the foot of the hill I saw a spot I remembered passing on the last journey down, long ago. Rising back from the road, and walled by heavy bush, was a square clearing, and in the background I saw plainly, by the broad moonlight, the stone foundations for a large house; from the front an avenue of grown pines came down to the road.

'Why!' I exclaimed, turning to the driver, 'was that house burnt down?'

'No,' he said slowly. 'That house was never built.'

I stared at the place again and caught sight of a ghostly-looking light between the lines of the foundations, which I presently made out to be a light in a tent.

'There's someone camping there,' I said.

'Yes,' said the driver, 'some old swaggy or "hatter." I seen him comin' down. I don't know nothing about that there place.' (I hadn't 'shouted' for him yet.)

I thought and remembered. I remembered myself, as a boy, being sent a coach journey along this road to visit some relatives in Sydney. We passed this place, and the women in the coach began to talk of the fine house that was going to be built there. The ground was being levelled for the foundations, and young pines had been planted, with stakes round them to protect them from the cattle. I remembered being mightily interested in the place, for the

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women said that the house was to be a two-storeyed one. I thought it would be a wonderful thing to see a two-storeyed house there in the Bush. The height of my ambition was to live in a house with stairs in it. The women said that this house was being built for young Brassington, the son of the biggest squatter then in the district, who was going to marry the daughter of the next biggest squatter. That was all I remember hearing the women say.

Three or four miles along the road was a public-house, with a post-office, general store, and blacksmith shop attached, as is usual in such places—all that was left of the old pastoral and coaching town of Ilford. I 'shouted' for the driver at the shanty, but got nothing further out of him concerning the fate of the house that was never built. I wanted that house for a story.

However, while yarning with some old residents at Solong, I mentioned the Brassingtons, and picked up a few first links in the story. The young couple were married and went to Sydney for their honeymoon. The story went that they intended to take a trip to the old country and Paris, to be away a twelvemonth, and the house was to be finished and ready for them on their return. Young Brassington himself had a big sheep-run round there. The railway wasn't thought of in those days, or if it was, no Brasssington could have dreamed that the line could have been brought to Solong in any other direction than through the property of the 'Big Brassingtons,' as they were called. Well, the young couple went to Sydney, but whether they went farther the old residents did not know. All they knew was that within a few weeks, and before the stone foundations for the brick walls of the house were completed, the building contract was cancelled, the workmen were dismissed, and the place was left as I last saw it; only the ornamental pines had now grown to trees. The Brassingtons and the bride's people were English families and reserved. They kept the story, if there was a story, to themselves. The

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girl's people left the district and squatted on new stations up country. The Big Brassingtons came down in the world and drifted to the city, as many smaller people do, more and more every year. Neither young Brassington nor his wife was ever again seen or heard of in the district.

I attended my relative's funeral, and next day started back for Sydney.

Just as we reached Ilford, as it happened, the pin of the fore under-carriage of the coach broke, and it took the blacksmith several hours to set it right. The place was dull, the publican was not communicative—or else he harped on the old local grievance of the railway not having come that way—so, about half an hour before I thought the coach would be ready, I walked on along the road to stretch my legs. I walked on and on until I came, almost unaware, to the site of the house that was never built. The tent was still there, in fact, it was a permanent camp, and I was rather surprised to see the man working with a trowel on a corner of the unfinished foundations of the house. At first I thought he was going to build a stone hut in the corner, but when I got close to him I saw that he was working carefully on the original plan of the building: he was building the unfinished parts of the foundation walls up to the required height. He had bricklayer's tools, a bag of lime, and a heap of sand, and had worked up a considerable quantity of mortar. It was a rubble foundation: he was knocking off the thin end of a piece of stone to make it fit, and the clanging of the trowel prevented his hearing my footsteps.

'Good-day, mate,' I said, close beside him.

I half expected he'd start when I spoke, but he didn't: he looked round slowly, but with a haunted look in his eyes as if I might have been one of his ghosts. He was a tall man, gaunt and haggard-eyed, as many men are in the Bush; he may have been but little past middle age, and grey before his time.

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'Good-day,' he said, and he set the stone in its place, carefully flush with the outer edge of the wall, before he spoke again. Then he looked at the sun, which was low, laid down his trowel, and asked me to come to the tent-fire. 'It's turning chilly,' he said. It was a model camp, everything clean and neat both inside the tent and out; he had made a stone fireplace with a bark shelter over it, and a table and bench under another little shed, with shelves for his tin cups and plates and cooking utensils. He put a box in front of the fire and folded a flour-bag on top of it for a seat for me, and hung the billy over the fire. He sat on his heels and poked the burning sticks, abstractedly I thought, or to keep his hands and thoughts steady.

'I see you're doing a bit of building,' I said.

'Yes,' he said, keeping his eyes on the fire; 'I'm getting on with it slowly.'

I don't suppose he looked at me half-a-dozen times the whole while I was in his camp. When he spoke he talked just as if he were sitting yarning in a row of half-a-dozen of us. Presently he said suddenly, and giving the fire a vicious dig with his poker,—

'That house must be finished by Christmas.'

'Why?' I asked, taken by surprise. 'What's the hurry?'

'Because,' he said, 'I'm going to be married in the New Year—to the best and dearest girl in the Bush.'

There was an awkward pause on my part, but presently I pulled myself together.

'You'll never finish it by yourself,' I said. 'Why don't you put on some men?'

'Because,' he said, 'I can't trust them. Besides, how am I to get bricklayers and carpenters in a place like this?'

I noticed all through that his madness or the past in his mind was mixed up with the real and the present.

'Couldn't you postpone the marriage?' I asked.

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'No!' he exclaimed, starting to his feet. 'No!' and he looked round wildly on the darkening Bush. There was madness in his tone that time, the last 'No!' sounding as if from a man who was begging for his life.

'Couldn't you run up a shanty then, to live in until the house is ready?' I suggested, to soothe him.

He gave his arm an impatient swing. 'Do you think I'd ask that girl to live in a hut?' he said. 'She ought to live in a palace!'

There seemed no way out of it, so I said nothing: he turned his back and stood looking away over the dark, low-lying sweep of Bush towards sunset. He folded his arms tight, and seemed to me to be holding himself. After a while he let fall his arms and turned and blinked at me and the fire like a man just woke from a doze or rousing himself out of a deep reverie.

'Oh, I almost forgot the billy!' he said. 'I'll make some tea —you must be hungry.'

He made the tea and fried a couple of slices of ham; he laid the biggest slice on a thick slice of white baker's bread on a tin plate, and put it and a pint-pot full of tea on a box by my side. 'Have it here, by the fire,' he said; 'it's warmer and more comfortable.'

I took the plate on my knee, and I must say I thoroughly enjoyed that meal. The bracing mountain air and the walk had made me hungry. The 'hatter,'[1] had his meal standing up, cutting his ham on a slice of bread with a clasp-knife. It was Bush fashion, and set me thinking of some old times. He ate very little, and, as far as I saw, he didn't smoke. Non-smokers are very scarce in the Bush.

I saw by the way his tent was pitched and his camp arranged generally, and by the way he managed the cooking, that he must have knocked about the Bush for some years.

[1] 'Hatter'—a man who lives and works alone in the Bush

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He put the plates and things away and came and sat down on the other empty gin-case by my side, and fell to poking the fire again. He never showed the least curiosity as to who I was, or where I came from, or what I was doing on this deserted track: he seemed to take me as a matter of course—but all this was in keeping with Bush life in general.

Presently he got up and stood looking upwards over the place where the house should have been.

'I think now,' he said slowly, 'I made a mistake in not having the verandahs carried all round the house.'

'I—I beg pardon!'

'I should have had the balcony all round instead of on two sides only, as the man who made the plan suggested; it would have looked better and made the house cooler in summer.'

I thought as I listened, and presently I saw that it was a case of madness within madness, so to speak: he was mad on the idea that he could build the house himself, and then he had moods when he imagined that the house had been built and he had been married and had reared a family.

'You could easily get the balcony carried round,' I said; 'it wouldn't cost much—you can get good carpenters at Solong.'

'Yes,' he said. 'I'll have it done after Christmas.' Then he turned from the house and blinked down at me.

'I am sorry,' he said, 'that there's no one at home. I sent the wife and family to Sydney for a change. I've got the two boys at the Sydney Grammar School. I think I'll send the eldest to King's College at Parramatta. The girls will have to get along with a governess at home and learn to help their mother—'

And so he went on talking away just as a man who has made money in the Bush, and is married and settled down, might yarn to an old bachelor Bush mate.

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'I suppose I'll have to get a good piano,' he went on. 'The girls must have some amusement: there'll be no end of balls and parties. I suppose the boys will soon be talking of getting "fivers" and "tenners" out of the "guvner" or "old man." It's the way of the world. And they'll marry and leave us. It's the way of the world—'

It was awful to hear him go on like this, the more so because he never smiled—just talked on as if he had said the same thing over and over again. Presently he stopped, and his eyes and hands began to wander: he sat down on his heel to the fire again and started poking it. I began to feel uneasy; I didn't know what other sides there might be to his madness, and wished the coach would come along.

'You've knocked about the Bush a good deal?' I asked. I couldn't think of anything else to say, and I thought he might break loose if I let him brood too long.

'Yes,' he said, 'I have.'

'Been in Queensland and the Gulf Country, I suppose?'

'I have.'

His tone and manner seemed a bit more natural. He had knocked about pretty well all over Australia, and had been in many places where I had been. I had got him on the right track, and after a bit he started telling Bush yarns and experiences, some of them awful, some of them very funny, and all of them short and good; and now and then, looking at the side of his face, which was all he turned to me, I thought I detected the ghost of a smile.

One thing I noticed about him; when he spoke as a madman, he talked like a man who had been fairly well educated (or sometimes, I fancied, like a young fellow who was studying to be a school-teacher); his speech was deliberate and his grammar painfully correct—far more so than I have made it; but when he spoke as an old Bushman, he dropped his *g's* and often turned his grammar back to front. But that reminds me that I have met English college men who did the same thing after being a few years in the Bush;

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either they dropped their particular way of speaking because it was mimicked, because they were laughed and chaffed out of it, or they fell gradually into the habit of talking as rough Bushmen do (they learnt Australian), as clean-mouthed men fall, in spite of themselves, into the habit of swearing in the heat and hurry and rough life of a shearing-shed. And, coming back into civilised life, these men, who had been well brought up, drop into their old manner and style of speaking as readily as the foulest-mouthed man in a shed or camp—who, amongst his fellows, cannot say three words without an oath—can, when he finds himself in a decent home in the woman-and-girl world, yarn by the hour without letting slip a solitary little damn.

The hatter warmed up the tea-billy again, got out some currant buns, which he had baked himself in the camp-oven, and we were yarning comfortably like two old Bushmen, and I had almost forgotten that he was 'ratty,' when we heard the coach coming. I jumped up to hurry down to the road. This seemed to shake him up. He gripped my hand hard and glanced round in his frightened, haunted way. I never saw the eyes of a man look so hopeless and helpless as his did just then.

'I'm sorry you're going,' he said, in a hurried way. 'I'm sorry you're going. But—but they all go. Come again, come again—we'll all be glad to see you.'

I had to hurry off and leave him. 'We all,' I suppose, meant himself and his ghosts.

I ran down between the two rows of pines and reached the road just as the coach came up. I found the publican from Ilford aboard—he was taking a trip to Sydney. As the coach went on I looked up the clearing and saw the hatter standing straight behind the fire, with his arms folded and his face turned in our direction. He looked ghastly in the firelight, and at that distance his face seemed to have an expression of listening blindness. I looked round on the dark Bush, with, away to the left, the last glow of sunset

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fading from the bed of it, like a bed of reddening coals, and I looked up at the black loom of Aaron's Pass, and thought that never a man, sane or mad, was left in such a depth of gloomy loneliness.

'I see you've been yarning with him yonder,' said the publican, who seemed to have relaxed wonderfully.

'Yes.'

'You know these parts, don't you?'

'Yes. I was about here as a boy.'

He asked me what my name might be. I told him it was Smith. He blinked a while.

'I never heard of anyone by the name of Smith in the district,' he said.

Neither had I. I told him that we lived at Solong, and didn't stay long. It saved time.

'Ever heard of the Big Brassingtons?'

'Yes.'

'Ever heard the yarn of the house that wasn't built?'

I told him how much I had heard of it.

'And that's about all any on 'em knows. Have you any idea who that man back yonder is?'

'Yes, I have.'

'Well, who do you think it is?'

'He is, or rather he was, young Brassington.'

'You've hit it!' said the publican. 'I know—and a few others.'

'And do you know what became of his wife?' I asked.

'I do,' said the shanty-keeper, who had a generous supply of whisky with him, and seemed to have begun to fill himself up for the trip.

He said no more for a while, and when I had remained silent long enough, he went on, very deliberately and impressively,—

'One yarn is that the girl wasn't any good; that when she was married to Brassington, and as soon as they got to Sydney, she met a chap she'd been carrying on with before

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she married Brassington (or that she'd been married to in secret), an' she cleared off with him, leaving her fortnight-old husband. That was one yarn.'

'Was it?' I said.

'Yes,' said the publican. 'That yarn was a lie.' He opened a flask of whisky and passed it round.

'There was madness in the family,' he said, after a nip.

'Whose?' I asked. 'Brassington's?'

'No,' said the publican, in a tone that implied contempt at my ignorance, in spite of its innocence, 'the girl's. Her mother had been in a 'sylum, and so had her grandmother. It was—it was heridited. Some madnesses is heridited, an' some comes through worry and hard graft (that's mine), an' some comes through drink, and some through worse, and, but as far as I've heard, all madnesses is pretty much the same. My old man was a warder in a 'sylum. They have their madnesses a bit different, the same as boozers has their D.T.'s different; but, takin' it by the lump, it's pretty much all the same. The difference is accordin' to their natures when they're sane. All men are—'

'But about young Mrs Brassington,' I interrupted.

'Young Mrs Brassington? Rosy Webb she was, daughter of Webb the squatter. Rosy was the brightest, best, good-heartedest, an' most ladylike little girl in the district, an' the heriditry business come on her in Sydney, about a week after she was married to young Brassington. She was only twenty. Here—' He passed the flask round.

'And what happened?' I asked.

'What happened?' he repeated. Then he pulled himself together, as if conscious that he had shown signs of whisky. 'Everything was done, but it was no use. She died in a year in a 'sylum.'

'How do you know that?'

'How do I know that?' he repeated in a tone of contempt. 'How do I know that? Well, I'll tell you how.

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My old wife was in service at Brassington's station at the time—the oldest servant—an' young Brassington wired to her from Sydney to come and help him in his trouble. Old Mrs Brassington was bedridden, an' they kep' it from her.'

'And about young Brassington?'

'About young Brassington? He took a swag an' wandered through the Bush. We've had him at our place several times all these years, but he always wandered off again. My only woman tried everything with him, but it was all no use. Years ago she used to get him to talk of things as they was, in hopes of bringin' his mind back, but he was always worse after. She does all she can for him even now, but he's mighty independent. The last five or six years he's been taken with the idea of buildin' that cursed house. He'll stay there till he gets short of money, an' then he'll go out-back, shearin', stock-ridin', drovin', cookin', fencin'—anything till he gets a few pounds. Then he'll settle down and build away at that bloody house. He's knocked about so much that he's a regular old Bushman. While he's an old Bushman he's all right an' amusin' an' good company; but when he's Brassington he's mad—Don't you ever let on to my old woman that I told you. I allers let my tongue run a bit when I get out of that hole we're living in. We've kept the secret all these years, but what does it matter now?—I ask you.'

'It doesn't matter much,' I said.

'Nothing matters much, it seems to me, nothing matters a damn. The Big Brassingtons come down years ago; the old people's gone, and the young scattered God knows where or how. The Webbs (the girl's people) are away up in new country, an' the girls (they was mostly all girls) are married an' settled down by this time. We kept the secret, an' the Webbs kept the secret—even when the dirty yarns was goin' round—so's not to spoil the chances of the other girls. What about the chances of their husbands?

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Some on 'em might be in the same hell as Brassington for all I know. The Brassingtons kept the secret because I suppose they reckoned it didn't matter much. Nothing matters much in this world—'

But I was thinking of another young couple who had married long ago, whose married life was twenty long years of shameful quarrels, of useless brutal recrimination—not because either was bad, but because their natures were too much alike; of the house that was built, of the family that was reared, of the sons and daughters who 'went wrong,' of the father and mother separated after twenty years, of the mother dead of a broken heart, of the father (in a lunatic asylum), whose mania was not to build houses, but to obtain and secrete matches for the purpose of burning houses down.

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'BARNEY, TAKE ME HOME AGAIN'

THIS is a sketch of one of the many ways in which a young married woman, who is naturally thick-skinned and selfish—as most women are—and who thinks she loves her husband, can spoil his life because he happens to be good-natured, generous, sensitive, weak or soft, whichever you like to call it.

Johnson went out to Australia a good many years ago with his young wife and two children, as assisted emigrants. He should have left his wife and children with her mother, in a street off City Road, N., and gone out by himself and got settled down comfortably and strengthened in the glorious climate and democratic atmosphere of Australia, and in the knowledge that he could worry along a while without his wife, before sending for her. That bit of knowledge would have done her good also, and it would have been better for both of them. But no man knows the future, and few can prescribe for their own wives. If we saw our married lives as others see them, half of us would get divorced. But Johnson was sentimental, he couldn't bear to part from his wife for a little while. Moreover, man is instinctively against leaving his wife behind; it may be either a natural or a cowardly instinct—but we won't argue that. I don't believe that Johnson was a coward in that direction; I believe that he trusted his wife implicitly, or rather that he never dreamed of such a thing—as is the way with most married men. Sentiment is selfishness,

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perhaps, but we won't argue that, such arguments come to nothing.

I heard from a fellow-passenger of Johnson's that he had 'a hell of a voyage' because of his young wife's ignorant selfishness and his own sensitiveness; he bribed stewards for better food and accommodation for his wife and children, paid the stewardess to help with the children, got neither rest, nor peace, nor thanks for himself, and landed in Sydney a nervous wreck, with five pounds out of the ten he started with.

Johnson was a carpenter. He got work from a firm of contractors in Sydney, who, after giving him a fortnight's trial, sent him up-country to work on the railway station buildings, at the little pastoral mining and farming town of Solong. The railway having come to Solong, things were busy in the building line, and Johnson settled there.

Johnson was thin when he came to Solong; he had landed a living skeleton, he said, but he filled out later on. The democratic atmosphere soothed his mind and he soon loved the place for its unconventional hospitality. He worked hard and seemed to have plenty of energy—he said he got it in Australia. He said that another year of the struggle in London would have driven him mad. He fished in the river on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, and, perhaps for the first month or so, he thought that he had found peace. Johnson's wife was a rather stout, unsympathetic-looking young woman, with the knit of obstinacy in her forehead; she had that stamp of 'hardness' on her face which is the rule amongst English and the exception amongst Australian women. We of Solong thought her hard, selfish and narrow-minded, and paltry; later on we thought she was a 'bit touched'; but local people often think that of strangers.

By her voice and her habit of whining she should have been a thin, sharp-faced, untidy, draggled-tailed woman in a back street in London, or a worn-out selector's wife in

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the Bush. She whined about the climate. 'It will kill the children! It will kill the children! We'll never rear them here!' She whined about the 'wretched hole in the Bush' that her husband had brought her to; and to the women whom she condescended to visit—because a woman must have a woman to talk to—she exaggerated the miseries of the voyage until the thing became a sing-song from repetition. Later on she settled down to endless accounts of her home in London, of her mother and sisters, of the way they lived. 'And I'll never see it any more. I'll never see them any more.'

The Solong climate was reckoned the best in Australia; the 'wretched hole' was a pretty little town on the banks of a clear, willow-bordered river, with vineyards on the slopes, and surrounded by a circle of blue hills and peaks. We knew nothing of London, so she had her own way there.

'She'll feel a bit lonely at first, but she'll soon get used to Australia,' said Johnson. He seemed to me to go out of his way to excuse his wife.

Johnson had had a few contracts in England at one time; they had been in 'better circumstances'—that was the time she looked back to in England; the last two years of bitter, black struggle at 'home' seemed a blank in her mind—but that's how women jump over facts when they have a selfish fad.

Johnson rented a cottage and garden on the bank of the sunny river. He said he took the place because there was ivy growing on the cottage, and it might cheer his wife; but he had lost sight of the fact that, while he had been born in an English village, his wife had been born and bred in London, and had probably never noticed ivy. She said it was worse than living in a slum.

Johnson was clever at his trade, and at many other things, but his wife didn't seem aware of it. He was well liked, he grew to be popular, but she didn't seem proud of the fact; she never seemed interested in him or his

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prospects. She only wanted him to take her home again. We mustn't forget that while he had a rush of work to occupy his mind she had not.

But Johnson grew stouter and prospered in spite of his wife—for a year or so. New schools were being built in the district and the town was practically re-built. Johnson took contracts for brickwork, plumbing and house-painting, as well as carpentering, and had at one time as many as ten men in his employ. He was making money.

I was working at my trade then, house-painting, and worked for Johnson. I lodged at his cottage for a while, but soon got tired of hearing about London, and Mrs Johnson's mother and sisters, and the house they lived in, and the street it was in, and the parks where they used to take their babies, and the shopping on Saturday afternoon. That woman was terrible. She was at Johnson all the time about taking her home. 'We'll surely be able to go home this year, Will.' 'You promised to take me home by the end of the year.' 'Mother says in her last letter that Jack says there's more building going on about London than ever.' 'You'll do just as well in London as you'll do here.' 'What chance have the children got in a hole like this?' And the rest of it—every night. When he took a new contract, it would be, 'What did you want to take that new contract for, Will, when we're going home? You know you promised me you wouldn't take any more contracts.' First he'd try to cheer her, then he'd argue; but she'd only sit with the knit in her forehead deep, looking as obstinate as a mule. Then she'd sit down to a little harmonium he'd bought her and play and sing 'Barney, take me Home again,' and 'The Old Folks at Home,' and 'Swannie Ribber,' till I felt like hanging myself—and *I* wasn't an exile. Sometimes Johnson would flare up and there'd be a row and he'd go to the pub. Gentle persuasion, argument, or swearing, it was all the same with her.

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Bosses and men were different towards each other in Solong to what they are in London; besides, when I wasn't Johnson's sub-contractor I was his foreman—so we often had a few drinks together; and one night over a beer (and after a breeze at home, I think) he said to me,—

'I can't make it out, Harry; there was nothing but struggle and worry and misery for us in England, and London was smothering me, my chest was bad and the wife was always in ill-health; but I suppose I'll have to take her home in the end or else she'll go melancholy mad!' And he drew a breath that was more like a gasp than a sigh.

'Why not send her home for a trip, or a year or so, boss?' I asked. 'As likely as not she'll be just as eager to get back; and that will be the end of it.'

'I couldn't do that, Harry,' said Johnson. 'I couldn't stay here and work alone. It would be like beginning life again; I've started twice and couldn't start the third time. You'll understand when you're married, Harry.'

Well, in the end, she wore Johnson out—or wore into him rather. He drank more, and once or twice I saw him drinking alone. Sometimes he'd 'round on us' at work for nothing at all, and at other times he'd take no interest in the jobs—he'd let the work go on anyhow. Some thought that Johnson was getting too big for his boots, that's how men are misjudged. He grew moody and melancholy and thin again. Johnson was homesick himself. No doubt it was the misery of his domestic life in Australia that made him so.

Towards the end of the third or fourth year Johnson threw up a couple of contracts he had on hand, sacrificed a piece of land which he had bought and on which he had built a cottage in the short time he had been in Solong, and, one lovely day in June, when the skies were their fairest, the hills their bluest, the river its widest and clearest, and the grass was waving waist high after rain—one blue

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and green and golden day the Johnsons left Solong, with the trunks they had brought out with them, for Sydney, *en route* for smoky London.

Mrs Johnson was a woman transformed—she was happy and looked it. The last few weeks she had seemed in every way the opposite of the woman we had known: cheerful, kind to neighbours in sickness and trouble, even generous; she made many small presents in the way of mantelshelf ornaments, pictures, house-linen, etc. But then it was Johnson who had to pay for that in the end.

He looked worn and worried at the railway station—more like himself as he was when he first came to Solong—and as the train moved off I thought he looked—well, frightened.

That must have been nearly twenty years ago.

. . . . . .

London last winter. It was one of those days when London's lurid sun shows up for a little while like a smoky danger-signal. The snow had melted from the house-tops and the streets were as London streets are after the first fall of snow of the season. But I could stand the flat no longer, I had to go out and walk. I was sun-sick—I was heart-sick for the sun, for the sunny South—for grassy plains, blue mountains, sweeps of mountain bush and sunny ocean beaches. I walked hard; I walked till I was mud-splashed to the shoulders; I walked through the squalid, maddening sameness of miles of dingy, grimy-walled blocks and rows of four-storeyed houses till I felt smothered—jailed, hopelessly. 'Best get home and in, and draw the blinds on it,' I said, 'or my brain will turn.'

I was about to ask a policeman where I was when I saw, by the name on a corner of the buildings, that I was in City Road, North.

All the willow-fringed rivers and the sunny hills of Solong flashed before me at the sight of the name of that street. I had not been able to recall the name of the street off

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City Road in which the Johnsons lived, though I had heard it often enough in the old days from the tongue of Mrs Johnson.

I felt it would be a relief to see anyone who had been in Australia. 'Now,' I thought, 'if I walk along City Road and see the name of that street I'll remember it'—and I did. It was a blind street, like the long, narrow yard of a jail, walled by dark houses, all alike. The next door but one to that at which I knocked to inquire was where the Johnsons lived; they lived in a four-storey house, or rather a narrow section of a four-storeyed terrace. I found later on that they paid the landlord, or nearly paid him, by letting lodgings. They lived in one room with the use of the parlour and the kitchen when the lodgers weren't using them, and the son shared a room with a lodger. The back windows looked out on the dead wall of a poorhouse of some kind, the front on rows of similar windows opposite—rows of the same sort of windows that run for miles and miles in London. In one a man sat smoking in his shirt-sleeves, from another a slavey leaned out watching a four-wheeler that had stopped next door, in a third a woman sat sewing, and in a fourth a woman was ironing, with a glimpse of a bedstead behind her. And all outside was gloom and soot and slush.

I would never have recognised the Johnsons. I have visited them several times since and their faces are familiar to me now, but I don't know whether any traces of the old likenesses worked up in my memory. I found Johnson an old man—old and grey before his time. He had a grizzly stubble round his chin and cheeks towards the end of the week, because he could only afford a shave on Saturday afternoon. He was working at some branch of his trade 'in the shop' I understood, but he said he felt the work come heavier on him every winter. 'I've felt very poorly this last winter or two,' he said, 'very poorly indeed.' He was very sad and gentle.

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Mrs Johnson was old and thin-looking, but seemed cheerful and energetic. Some chest trouble kept her within doors most of the winter.

'I don't mind so long as I can manage,' she said, 'but Johnson gets so depressed.'

They seemed very kind towards each other; they spoke little of Australia, and then only as an incident in their lives which was not of any importance—had long been past and done with. It was all 'before we went to Australia' or 'after we came back from Australia' with Mrs Johnson.

The son, whom I remembered as a bright, robust little fellow, was now a tall, white-faced, clean-shaven young man, a clerk on thirty shillings a week. He wore, on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, a tall hat and a frock coat and overcoat made cheaply in the latest fashion, so he couldn't afford to help the old folk much.

'David is very extravagant,' said the old man, gently. 'He won't wear anything when once the gloss is off it. But,' with a sad smile, 'I get the left-off overcoats.'

He took me across to see his daughter. She had married a tradesman and they were having a hard struggle in three rooms in a workman's dwelling. She was twenty-five, thin, yellow, and looking ten years older.

There were other children who had died. 'I think we might have done better for the children in Australia,' said the old man to me, sadly, when we got outside, 'but we did our best.'

We went into a hotel and had a drink. Johnson had treated last time—twenty years before. We call treating 'shouting' in Australia. Presently Johnson let fall a word or two of Australian slang, and brightened up wonderfully; we got back out into Australia at once and stayed there an hour or so. Being an old man, Johnson's memory for the long ago was better than mine, and I picked up links; and, in return, I told him what Solong was like now, and how some men he knew, who were going up, had gone down,

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and others, who were going to the dogs in his time, had gone up—and we philosophized. About one he'd say, 'Ah, well! who'd have thought it! I never thought that boy would come to any good'; about another, 'Ah, well! and he might have been an independent man.' How familiar that expression sounded!—I think it is used more often in Australia than in any other country: 'He might have been an independent man.'

When I left Johnson I felt less lonely in London, and rather humbled in spirit. He seemed so resigned—I had never seen such gentle sadness in a man's eyes, nor heard it in a man's voice. I could get back to Australia somehow and start life again, but Johnson's day had been dead for many years. 'Besides, assisted emigration's done away with now,' he said, with his sad, sad smile.

I saw the Johnsons again later on. 'Things have been going very sadly with us, very sadly indeed,' said the old man, when we'd settled down. He had broken down at the beginning of the winter, he had dragged himself out of bed and to work and back again until he could do so no longer; he had been laid up most of the winter. Mrs Johnson had not been outside the door for months.

'It comes very hard on us,' she said, 'and I'm so poorly, and David out of work, too. I wouldn't mind if I could get about. But,' she went on in her energetic manner, 'we've had the house full all the winter; we've had very good luck with the lodgers, all respectable people, and one of them answers the door and that keeps me away from the draught—so it might be worse, mightn't it? But Johnson doesn't seem to mend at all, and he gets so terribly depressed. But the warm weather coming on, etc.'

They and the Lord only knew how they managed to live, for they are honest people and the lodgers scarcely pay the rent of the house. There was only David between them and the poorhouse, as far as I could see.

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Johnson came out with me a piece and we had a drink or two together—his was gin hot. He talked a good deal about Australia, but sadly and regretfully on this occasion.

'We could have done well in Australia,' he said, 'very well indeed. I might have been independent and the children well started in life. But we did things for the best. Mrs Johnson didn't like Australia, you know. It was a pity we didn't stay there, a great pity. We would have done far better than in England. I'd go out again now if I had the money, but I'm getting too old.'

'Would Mrs Johnson go out?' I asked.

'Oh, yes. But I'm afraid she wouldn't stand the voyage. . . . Things have been very sad with us ever since we came back to England, very sad indeed.' And after a while he suddenly caught his breath.

'It takes me that way sometimes,' he said. 'I catch my breath just as if I was going to lose it.'

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A DROVING YARN.

ANDY MACULLOCH had heard that old Bill Barker, the well-known overland drover, had died over on the Westralian side, and Dave Regan told a yarn about Bill.

'Bill Barker,' said Dave, talking round his pipe stem, 'was the *quintessence* of a drover—'

'The whatter, Dave?' came the voice of Jim Bentley, in startled tones, from the gloom on the far end of the verandah.

'The quintessence,' said Dave, taking his pipe out of his mouth. 'You shut up, Jim. As I said, Bill Barker was the quintessence of a drover. He'd been at the game ever since he was a nipper. He run away from home when he was fourteen and went up into Queensland. He's been all over Queensland and New South Wales and most of South Australia, and a good deal of the Western, too: over the great stock routes from one end to the other, Lord knows how many times. No man could keep up with him riding out, and no one could bring a mob of cattle or a flock of sheep through like him. He knew every trick of the game; if there was grass to be had Bill'd get it, no matter whose run it was on. One of his games in a dry season was to let his mob get boxed with the station stock on a run where there was grass, and before Bill's men and the station-hands could cut 'em out, the travelling stock would have a good bellyful to carry them on the track. Billy was the daddy of the drovers. Some said that he could ride in his sleep, and that he had one old horse that could jog along in

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his sleep too, and that—travelling out from home to take charge of a mob of bullocks or a flock of sheep—Bill and his horse would often wake up at daylight and blink round to see where they were and how far they'd got. Then Bill would make a fire and boil his quart-pot, and roast a bit of mutton, while his horse had a mouthful of grass and a spell.

'You remember Bill, Andy? Big dark man, and a joker of the loud sort. Never slept with a blanket over him — always folded under him on the sand or grass. Seldom wore a coat on the route—though he always carried one with him, in case he came across a Bush ball or a funeral. Moleskins, flannel waistcoat, cabbage-tree hat and 'lastic side boots. When it was roasting hot on the plains and the men swore at the heat, Jim would yell, "Call this hot? Why, you blanks, I'm freezin'! Where's me overcoat?" When it was raining and hailing and freezing on Bell's Line in the Blue Mountains in winter, and someone shivered and asked "Is it cold enough for yer now, Bill?" "Cold!" Bill would bellow, "I'm sweatin'!"

'I remember it well. I was little more than a youngster then — Bill Barker came past our place with about a thousand fat sheep for the Hombush sale-yards at Sydney, and he gave me a job to help him down with them on Bell's Line over the mountains, and mighty proud I was to go with him, I can tell you. One night we camped on the Cudgegong River. The country was dry and pretty close cropped and we'd been "sweating" the paddocks all along there for our horses. You see, where there weren't slip-rails handy we'd just take the tomahawk and nick the top of a straight-grained fence post, just above the mortise, knock out the wood there, lift the top rail out and down, and jump the horses in over the lower one—it was all two-rail fences around there with sheep wires under the lower rail. And about daylight we'd have the horses out, lift

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back the rail, and fit in the chock that we'd knocked out. Simple as striking matches, wasn't it?

'Well, the horses were getting a good bellyful in the police horse paddock at night, and Bill took the first watch with the sheep. It was very cold and frosty on the flat and he thought the sheep might make back for the ridges; it's always warmer up in the ridges in winter out of the frost. Bill roused me out about midnight. "There's the sheep," he says, pointing to a white blur. "They've settled down. I think they'll be quiet till daylight. Don't go round them; there's no occasion to go near 'em. You can stop by the fire and keep an eye on 'em."

'The night seemed very long. I watched and smoked and toasted my shins, and warmed the billy now and then, and thought up pretty much the same sort of old things that fellers on night watch think over all over the world. Bill lay on his blanket, with his back to the fire and his arm under his head—freezing on one side and roasting on the other. He never moved. I itched once or twice to turn him over and bake the front of him—I reckoned he was about done behind.

'At last daylight showed. I took the billy and started down to the river to get some water to make coffee; but halfway down, near the sheep camp, I stopped and stared. I was never so surprised in my life. The white blur of sheep had developed into a couple of acres of long dead silver grass!

'I woke Bill, and he swore as I never heard a man swear before—nor since. He swore at the sheep, and the grass, and at me; but it would have wasted time, and besides I was too sleepy and tired to fight. But we found those sheep scattered over a scrubby ridge about seven miles back, so they must have slipped away back of the grass and started early in Bill's watch, and Bill must have watched that blessed grass for the first half of the night and then set me to watch it. He couldn't get away from that.

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'I wondered what the chaps would say if it got round that Bill Barker, the boss overland drover, had lost a thousand sheep in clear country with fences all round; and I suppose he thought that way too, for he kept me with him right down to Homebush, and when he paid me off he threw in an extra quid, and he said,—

'"Now, listen here, Dave! If I ever hear a word from anyone about watching that gory grass, I'll find you, Dave, and murder you, if you're in wide Australia. I'll screw your neck, so look out."

'But he's dead now, so it doesn't matter.'

. . . . . .

There was silence for some time after Dave had finished. The chaps made no comment on the yarn, either one way or the other, but sat smoking thoughtfully, and in a vague atmosphere as of sadness—as if they'd just heard of their mother's death and had not been listening to an allegedly humorous yarn.

Then the voice of old Peter, the station-hand, was heard to growl from the darkness at the end of the hut, where he sat on a three-bushel bag on the ground with his back to the slabs.

'What's old Peter growlin' about?' someone asked.

'He wants to know where Dave got that word,' someone else replied.

'What word?'

'*Quint-essents.*'

There was a chuckle.

'He got it out-back, Peter,' said Mitchell, the shearer. 'He got it from a newchum.'

'How much did yer give for it, Dave?' growled Peter.

'Five shillings, Peter,' said Dave, round his pipe stem. 'And stick of tobacco thrown in.'

Peter seemed satisfied, for he was heard no more that evening.

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BALLAD OF THE CORNSTALK

HE hung up the stock-whip and laid by the shears—
It may be for months and it may be for years;
It may be for ever—but restless was he:
'I'm tired of the Bush and I'm off for a spree!'

'I'm going to the war, and I don't know what's it's for,
But the other chaps are going with the Bush Contingent men,
But if I should stay behind, there'll be trouble on my mind,
For my girl would throw me over when they come back agen.'

He rode to the homestead to bid her good-bye,
And pride for her boy lit the tear in her eye.
They kissed at the slip-rails again and again—
And long may she wait by the slip-rails in vain.

'For I'm going to the war,' etc.

He mounted his waler and rode to the sea
(He was sick of the Bush and he longed for a spree),
He looked up the 'member' and called for his aid
To go to the war in the Bushman's Brigade.

'For I'm going to the war,' etc.

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To spy out the Boer lines he rode with a force,
And he in the gloaming lay shot from his horse,
A gum-tree transplanted that grew on the veldt—
And that's where they laid him, for that's how they felt.

'For I'm going to the war,' etc.

She waits by the slip-rails at sunset again,
But long may she wait by the slip-rails in vain!
She'll fret till her heart breaks, but such things shall be
While Cornstalks are restless and go for a spree.

'I'm going to the war, and I don't know what it's for,
But the other chaps are going with the Bush Contingent men,
And if I should stay behind, there'll be trouble in the wind,
For my girl would throw me over when they come back agen.'

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GETTIN' BACK ON DAVE REGAN

A RATHER FISHY YARN FROM THE BUSH

(As told by James Nowlett, Bullock-driver)

YOU might work this yarn up. I've often thought of doin' it meself, but I ain't got the words. I knowed a lot of funny an' rum yarns about the Bush, an' I often wished I had the gift o' writin'. I could tell a lot better yarns than the rot they put in books sometimes, but I never had no eddication. But you might be able to work this yarn up—as yer call it.

There useter be a teamsters' camp six or seven miles out of Mudgee, at a place called th' Old Pipeclay, in the days before the railroad went round to Dubbo, an' most of us bullickies useter camp there for the night. There was always good water in the crick, an' sometimes we'd turn the bullicks up in the ridges an' gullies behind for grass, an' camp there for a few days, and do our washin' an' mendin', and make new yokes perhaps, an' tinker up the waggons.

There was a woman livin' on a farm there named Mrs Hardwick—an' she *was* a hard wick. Her husban', Jimmy Hardwick, was throwed from his horse agenst a stump one day when he was sober, an' he was killed—an' she was a widder. She had a tidy bit o' land, an' a nice bit of a orchard an' vineyard, an' some cattle, an' they say she had a tidy bit o' money in the bank. She had the worst tongue in the district, no one's character was safe with her; but

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she wasn't old, an' she wasn't bad-lookin'—only hard—so there was some fellers hangin' round arter her. An' Dave Regan's horse was hangin' up outside her place as often as anybody else's. Dave was a native an' a Bushy, an' a drover an' a digger, an' he was a bit soft in them days—he got hard enough arterwards.

Mrs Hardwick hated bullick-drivers—she had a awful down on bullickies—I dunno why. We never interfered with her fowls, an' as for swearin'! why, she could swear herself. Jimmy Hardwick was a bullick-driver when she married him, an' p'r'aps that helped to account for it. She wouldn't let us boil our billies at her kitchen fire, same as any other Bush-woman, an' if one of our bullicks put his nose under her fence for a mouthful of grass, she'd set her dogs onter him. An' one of her dogs got something what disagreed with him one day, an' she accused us of layin' poisoned baits. An', arter that, she 'pounded some of our bullicks that got into her lucern paddick one night when we was on the spree in Mudgee, an' put heavy damages on 'em. She'd left the slip-rails down on purpose, I believe. She talked of puttin' the police onter us, jest as if we was a sly grog-shop. (If *she'd* kept a sly grog-shop she'd have had a different opinion about bullick-drivers.) An' all the bullick-drivers hated her because she hated bullickies.

Well, one wet season half a dozen of us chaps was camped there for a fortnight, because the roads was too boggy to travel, an' one night they got up a darnse at Peter Anderson's shanty acrost the ridges, an' a lot of gals an' fellers turned up from all round about in spite of the pourin' rain. Someone had kidded Dave Regan that Mother Hardwick was comin', an' he turned up, of course, in spite of a ragin' toothache he had. He was always ridin' the high horse over us bullickies. It was a very cold night, enough to cut the face an' hands off yer, so we had a roarin' fire in the big bark-an'-slab kitchen where the darnsin' was. It was one of them big, old-fashioned, clay-

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lined fireplaces that goes right acrost the end of the room, with a twenty-five foot slab-an'-tin chimbly outside.

Dave Regan was pretty wild about being had, an' we copped all the gals for darnsin'; he couldn't get one that night, an' when he wasn't proddin' out his tooth with a red-hot wire someone was chaffin' him about Mrs Hardwick. So at last he got disgusted an' left; but before he went he got a wet three-bushel flour bag an' climbed up very quietly onter the roof by the battens an' log weights an' riders, an' laid the wet bag very carefully acrost the top of the chimbly flue.

An' we was a mortal hour tryin' to find out what was the matter with that infernal chimbly, and tackin' bits o' tin an' baggin' acrost the top of the fireplace under the mantel-shelf to try an' stop it from smokin', an' all the while the gals set there with the water runnin' out of their eyes. We took the green back-log out an' fetched in a dry one, but that chimbly smoked worse than ever, an' we had to put the fire out altogether, an' the gals set there shiverin' till the rain held up a bit an' the sky cleared, an' then someone goes out an' looks up an' sings out, 'Why, there's somethin' acrost the top of the blazin' chimbly!' an' someone else climbs up an' fetches down the bag. But the darnse was spoilt, an' the gals was so disgusted that they went off with their fellers while the weather held up. They reckoned some of us bullickies did it for a lark.

An' arter that Dave'd come ridin' past, an' sing out to know if we knew of a good cure for a smokin' chimbly, an' them sorter things. But he always got away before we could pull him off of his horse. Three of us chased him on horseback one day, but we didn't ketch him.

So we made up our minds to git back on Dave some way or other, an' it come about this way.

About six months arter the smoked-out darnse, four or five of us same fellers was campin' on th' Pipeclay agen, an' it was a dry season. It was dryer an' hotter than it was

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cold'n' wet the larst time. Dave was still hangin' round Mrs Hardwick's an' doin' odd jobs for her. Well, one very hot day we seen Dave ridin' past into Mudgee, an' we knowed he'd have a spree in town that night, an' call at Mrs Hardwick's for sympathy comin' out next day; an' arter he'd been gone an hour or two, Tom Tarrant comes drivin' past on his mail-coach, an' drops some letters an' papers an' a bag o' groceries at our camp.

Tom was a hard case. I remember wonst I was drivin' along a lonely bit o' track, an' it was a grand mornin', an' I felt great, an' I got singin' an' practisin' a recitation that I allers meant to give at a Bush dance some night. (I never sung or spouted poetry unless I was sure I was miles away from anyone.) An' I got worked up, an' was wavin' me arms about an' throwin' it off of me chest, when Tom's coach comes up behind, round a bend in the road, an' took me by surprise. An' Tom looked at me very hard an' he says, 'What are yer shoutin' an' swearin' an' darnsin' an' goin' on at the bullicks like that for, Jimmy? They seem to be workin' all right.' It took me back, I can tell yer. The coach was full of grinnin' passengers, an' the worst of it was that I didn't know how long Tom had been drivin' slow behind me an' takin' me out of windin'. There's nothin' upsets a cove as can't sing so much as to be caught singin' or spoutin' poetry when he thinks he's privit'.

An' another time I remember Tom's coach broke down on the track, an' he had to ride inter town with the mails on horseback; an' he left a couple of greenhides, for Skinner the tanner at Mudgee, for me to take on in the waggon, an' a bag of potatoes for Murphy the storekeeper at Home Rule, an' a note that said: 'Render unto Murphy the things which is murphies, and unto Skinner them things which is skins.' Tom was a hard case.

Well, this day, when Tom handed down the tucker an' letters, he got down to stretch his legs and give the horses a breathe. The coach was full of passengers, an' I noticed

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they all looked extra glum an' sulky, but I reckoned it was the heat an' dust. Tom looked extra solemn, too, an' no one was talkin'. Then I suddenly began to notice something in the atmosphere, as if there was a dead beast not far away, an' my mates started sniffin' too. An' that reminds me, it's funny why some people allers sniff hard instead of keepin' their noses shut when there's a stink; the more it stinks the more they sniff. Tom spit in the dust an' thought a while; then he took a parcel out of the boot an' put it on the corner post of the fence. 'There,' he said, 'there's some fresh fish that come up from Sydney by train an' Cob & Co.'s coach larst night. They're meant for White the publican at Gulgong, but they won't keep this weather till I git out there. Pity to waste them! you chaps might as well have a feed of 'em. I'll tell White they went bad an' I had to throw them out,' says Tom. Then he got on to the coach agen an' drove off in a cloud o' dust. We undone the brown paper, an' the fish was in a small deal box, with a lid fastened by a catch. We nicked back the catch an' the lid flew open, an' then we knowed where the smell comed from all right. There wasn't any doubt about that! We didn't have to put our noses in the box to see if the fish was bad. They was packed in salt, but that made no difference.

You know how a smell will start sudden in the Bush on a hot, still day, an' then seem to take a spell, an' then get to work agen stronger than ever. You might be clost alongside of a horse that has been dead a fortnight an' smell nothin' particular till you start to walk away, an' the further you go the worse it stinks. It seems to smell most round in a circle of a hundred yards or so. But these fish smelt from the centre right out. Tom Tarrant told us arterwards that them fish started to smell as soon as he left Mudgee. At first they reckoned it was a dead horse by the road; but arter a while the passsengers commenced squintin' at each other suspicious like, an' the conversa-

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tion petered out, an' Tom thought he felt all their eyes on his back, an' it was very uncomfortable; an' he sat tight an' tried to make out where the smell come from; an' it got worse every hundred yards—like as if the track was lined with dead horses, an' everyone dead longer than the last—till it was like drivin' a funeral. An' Tom never thought of the fish till he got down to stretch his legs and fetched his nose on a level with the boot.

Well, we shut down the lid of that box quick an took it an' throwed it in the bushes a good way away from the camp, but next mornin', while we was havin' breakfast, Billy Grimshaw got a idea, an' arter breakfast he wetted a canvas bag he had an' lit up his pipe, an' went an' got that there box o' fish, an' put it in the wet bag, an' wrapped it tight round it an' tied it up tight with string. Billy had a nipper of a nephew with him, about fourteen, named Tommy, an' he was a sharp kid if ever there was one. So Billy says, 'Look here, Tommy, you take this fish up to Mrs Hardwick's an' tell her that Dave Regan sent 'em with his compliments, an' he hopes she'll enjoy 'em. Tell her that Dave fetched 'em from Mudgee, but he's gone back to look for a pound note that he dropped out of a hole in his pocket somewheers along the road, an' he asked you to take the fish up.' So Tommy takes the fish an' goes up to the house with 'em. When he come back he says that Mrs Hardwick smiled like a parson an' give him a shillin'—an' he didn't wait. We watched the house, an' about half-an-hour arterwards we seen her run out of the kitchen with the open box in her hand, an' run a good way away from the house an' throw the fish inter the bushes, an' then go back quick, holdin' her nose.

An' jest then, as luck would have it, we seen Dave Regan ridin' up from the creek towards the house. He got down an' went into the kitchen, an' then come backin' out agen in a hurry with her in front of him. We could hear her voice from where we was, but we couldn't hear what she

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said. But we could see her arms wavin' as if she was drivin' fowls, an' Dave backed all the way to his horse and gets on an' comes ridin' away quick, she screamin' arter him all the time. When he got down opposite the camp we sung out to know what was the matter. 'What have you been doin' to Mrs Hardwick, Dave?' we says. 'We heerd her goin' for yer proper jest now.' 'Damned if I know,' says Dave. 'I ain't done nothin' to her that I knows of. She's called me everything she can lay her tongue to, an' she's ravin' about my stinkin' fish, or somethin'. I can't make it out at all. I believe she's gone ratty.'

'But you *must* have been doin' somethin' to the woman,' we says, 'or else she wouldn't have gone on at yer like that.'

But Dave swore he hadn't, an' we talked it over for a while an' couldn't make head nor tail of it, an' we come to the conclusion that it was only a touch o' the sun.

'Never mind, Dave,' we says. 'Go up agen in a day or two, when she's cooled down, an' find out what the matter is. Or write to her. It might only have been someone makin' mischief. That's what it is.'

But Dave only sat an' rubbed his head, an' presently he started home to wherever he was hangin' out. He wanted a quiet week to think.

'Her chimbly might have been smokin', Dave,' we shouted arter him, but he was too dazed like to ketch on.

Well, in a month or two we was campin' there agen, an' we found she'd fenced in a lane to the crick she had no right to, an' we had to take the bullicks a couple o' miles round to grass an' water. Well, the first mornin' we seen her down in the corner of her paddick near the camp drivin' some heifers, an' Billy Grimshaw went up to the fence an' spoke to her. Billy was the only one of us that dared face her, and he was the only one she was ever civil to—p'r'aps because Billy had a squint an' a wall eye and that put her out of countenance.

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Billy took off his hat very respectful an' sings out, 'Mrs Hardwick.' (It was Billy's bullicks' she'd 'pounded,' by the way.)

'What is it?' she says.

'I want to speak to you, Mrs Hardwick,' says Billy.

'Well, speak,' she says. 'I've got no time to waste talkin' to bullick-drivers.'

'Well, the fact is, Mrs Hardwick,' says Billy, 'that I want to explain somethin', an' apologise for that young scamp of a nephew o' mine, young Tommy. He ain't here or I'd make him beg your pardon hisself, or I'd cut him to pieces with the bullick-whip. I heard all about Dave Regan sendin' you that stinkin' fish, an' I think it was a damned mean, dirty thing to do—to send stinkin' fish to a woman, an' especially to a widder an' an unprotected woman like you, Mrs Hardwick. I've had mothers an' sisters of me own. An' I want to tell yer that I'm sorry a relation o' mine ever had anythin' to do with it. As soon as I heerd of it I give young Tommy a lambastin' he won't forgit in a hurry.'

'Did Tommy know the fish was bad?' she says.

'It doesn't matter a rap,' says Billy, 'he had no right to go takin' messages from nobody to nobody.'

Mrs Hardwick thought a while. Then she says, 'P'r'aps arter all Dave Regan didn't know the fish was bad. I've often thought I might have been in too much of a hurry. Things goes bad so quick out here in this weather. An' Dave was always very friendly. I can't understand why he'd do a dirty thing on me like that. I never done anything to Dave.'

Now I forgot to tell you that Billy had a notion that Dave helped drive his bullicks to pound that time, though I didn't believe it. So Billy says,—

'Don't you believe that for a minute, Mrs Hardwick. Dave knew what he was a-doin' of all right; an' if I ketch

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him *I'll* give him a beltin' for it if no one else is man enough to stand up for a woman!' says Billy.

'How d'yer know Dave knew?' says Mrs Hardwick.

'Know!' says Billy. 'Why, he talked about it all over the district.'

'What!' she screamed out, an' I moved away from that there fence, for she had a stick to drive them heifers with. But Billy stood his ground. 'Is that the truth, Billy Grimshaw?' she screams.

'Yes,' he says. 'I'll take me oath on it. He blowed about it all over the district, as if it was very funny, an' he says—' An' Billy stopped.

'What did he say?' she shouted.

'Well, the fact is,' says Billy, 'that I hardly like to tell it to a lady. I wouldn't like to tell yer, Mrs Hardwick.'

'But you'll have to tell me, Billy Grimshaw,' she screams. 'I have a right to know. If you don't tell me I'll pull him next week an' have it dragged out of you in the witness-box!' she says, 'an' I'll have satisfaction out of him in the felon's dock of a court of law!' she says. 'What did the villain say?' she screams.

'Well,' says Billy, 'if yer must have it—an', anyway, I'm hanged if I'm goin' to stand by an' see a woman scandalised behind her back—if yer must have it I'll tell yer. Dave said that the fish didn't smell no worse than your place anyway.'

We got away from there then. She cut up too rough altogether. I can't tell you what she said—I ain't got the words. She went up to the house, an' we seen the farm-hand harnassin' up the horse, an' we reckoned she was goin' to drive into town straight away an' take out a summons agenst Dave Regan. An' jest then Dave hisself comes ridin' past—jest when he was most wanted, as usual. He always rode fast past Mrs Hardwick's nowadays, an' never stopped there, but Billy shouted after him,—

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'Hullo, Dave! I want to speak to yer,' shouts Billy. An' Dave yanks his horse round.

'What is it, Billy?' he says.

'Look here, Dave,' says Billy. 'You had your little joke about the chimbly, an' we had our little joke about the fish an' Mrs Hardwick, so now we'll call it quits. A joke's a joke, but it can go too far, an' this one's gettin' too red hot altogether. So we've fixed it up with Mrs Hardwick.'

'What fish an' what joke?' says Dave, rubbin' his head. 'An' what have yer fixed up with Mrs Hardwick? Whatever are yer talkin' about, Billy?'

So Billy told him all about us sendin' the stinkin' fish to Mrs Hardwick by Tommy, an' sayin' Dave sent 'em—Dave rubbin' the back of his neck an' starin' at Billy all the time. 'An' now,' says Billy, 'I won't say anything about them bullicks; but I went up an' seen Mrs Hardwick this mornin', an' told her the whole truth about them fish, an' how you knowed nothin' about it, an' I apologised an' told her we was very sorry; an' she says she was very sorry too on your account, an' wanted to see yer. I promised to tell yer as soon as I seen yer. It ought to be fixed up. You ought to go right up to the house an' see her now. She's awfully cut up about it.'

'All right,' says Dave, brightenin' up. 'It was a dirty, mean trick anyway to play on a cove; but I'll go up an' see her.' An' he went there'n' then.

An' about fifteen minutes arterwards he comes boltin' back from the house one way an' his horse the other. The horse acted as if it had a big scare, an' so did Dave. Billy went an' ketched Dave's horse for him, an' I got Dave a towel to wipe the dirty dish-water off of his face an' out of his hair an' collar, an' I give him a piece of soap to rub on the places where he'd been scalded.

'Why, the woman must be ravin' mad,' I says. 'Whatever did yer say to her this time, Dave? Yer allers gettin' inter hot water with her.'

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'I didn't say nothin',' says Dave. 'I jest went up laughin' like, an' says, "How are yer, Mrs Hardwick?" an' she ups an' lets me have a dish of dirty wash-up water, an' then on top of that she let fly with a dipper of scaldin'-hot, greasy water outer the boiler. She's gone clean ravin' mad, I think.'

'She's as mad as a hatter, right enough, Dave,' says Billy Grimshaw. 'Don't you go there no more, Dave, it ain't safe.' An' we lent Dave a hat an' a clean shirt, an' he went on inter town. 'You ought to have humoured her,' says Billy, as Dave rode away. 'You ought to have told her to put a wet bag over her chimbly an' hang the fish inside to smoke.' But Dave was too stunned to ketch on. He went on inter the town an' got on a howlin' spree. An' while he was soberin' up the thing began to dawn on him. An' the nex' time he met Billy they had a fight. An' Dave got another woman to speak to Mrs Hardwick, an' Mrs Hardwick ketched young Tommy goin' past her place one day an' bailed him up an' scared the truth out of him.

'Look here!' she says to him, 'I want the truth, the whole truth, an' nothin' but the truth about them fish, an' if I don't get it outer you I'll wring yer young neck for tryin' to poison me, an' save yer from the gallust!' she says to Tommy.

So he told her the whole truth, swelp him, an' got away; an' he respected Mrs Hardwick arter that.

An' next time we come past with the teams we seen Dave's horse hangin' up outside Mrs Hardwick's, an' we went some miles further along the road an' camped in a new place where we'd be more comfortable. An' ever arter that we used to always whip up an' drive past her place as if we didn't know her.

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'SHALL WE GATHER AT THE RIVER?'

TOLD BY JOE WILSON

'God's preacher, of churches unheeded,
God's Vineyard, though barren the sod,
Plain spokesman where spokesman is needed,
Rough link 'twixt the Bushman and God.'
The Christ of the Never.

I NEVER told you about Peter M'Laughlan. He was a sort of Bush missionary up-country and out-back in Australia, and before he died he was known from Riverina down South in New South Wales to away up through the Never-Never Country in Western Queensland.

His past was a mystery, so, of course, there were all sorts of yarns about him. He was supposed to be a Scotchman from London, and some said that he had got into trouble in his young days and had had to clear out of the old country; or, at least, that he had been a ne'er-do-well and had been sent out to Australia on the remittance system. Some said he'd studied for the law, some said he'd studied for a doctor, while others believed that he was, or had been, an ordained minister. I remember one man who swore (when he was drinking) that he had known Peter M'Laughlan as a medical student in a big London hospital, and that he had started in practice for himself somewhere near Gray's Inn Road in London. Any way, as I got to know him he struck me as being a man who had looked into the eyes of so much misery in his life that some of it had got into his own.

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He was a tall man, straight and well-built, and about forty or forty-five, when I first saw him. He had wavy dark hair, and a close, curly beard. I once heard a woman say that he had a beard like you see in some Bible pictures of Christ. Peter M'Laughlan seldom smiled; there was something in his big dark brown eyes that was scarcely misery, nor yet sadness—a sort of haunted sympathy.

He must have had money, or else he got remittances from home, for he paid his way and helped many a poor devil. They said that he gave away most of his money. Sometimes he worked for a while himself as book-keeper at a shearing shed, wool-sorter, shearer, even rouseabout; he'd work at anything a Bushman could get to do. Then he'd go out-back to God-forgotten districts and preach to Bushmen in one place, and get a few children together in another and teach them to read. He could take his drink, and swear a little when he thought it necessary. On one occasion, at a rough shearing shed, he called his beloved brethren 'damned fools' for drinking their cheques.

Towards the end of his life if he went into a 'rough shed or shanty west of the Darling River—and some of them *were* rough—there would be a rest in the language and drinking, even a fight would be interrupted, and there would be more than one who would lift their hats to Peter M'Laughlan. A Bushman very rarely lifts his hat to a man, yet the worst characters of the West have listened bareheaded to Peter when he preached.

It was said in our district that Peter only needed to hint to the squatter that he wanted fifty or a hundred pounds to help someone or something, and the squatter would give it to him without question or hesitation.

He'd nurse sick boundary-riders, shearers, and station-hands, often sitting in the desolate hut by the bedside of a sick man night after night. And, if he had time, he'd look up the local blacks and see how they were getting on.

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Once, on a far out-back sheep-station, he sat, for three nights running, by the bedside of a young Englishman, a B.A. they said he was, who'd been employed as tutor at the homestead and who died a wreck, the result of five years of life in London and Paris. The poor fellow was only thirty. And the last few hours of his life he talked to Peter in French, nothing but French. Peter understood French and one or two other languages, besides English and Australian; but whether the young wreck was raving or telling the story of a love, or his life, none of us ever knew, for Peter never spoke of it. But they said that at the funeral Peter's eyes seemed haunted more than usual.

There's the yarn about Peter and the dying cattle at Piora Station one terrible drought, when the surface was as bare as your hand for hundreds of miles, and the heat like the breath of a furnace, and the sheep and cattle were perishing by thousands. Peter M'Laughlan was out on the run helping the station-hands to pull out cattle that had got bogged in the muddy water-holes and were too weak to drag themselves out, when, about dusk, a gentlemanly 'piano-fingered' parson, who had come to the station from the next town, drove out in his buggy to see the man. He spoke to Peter M'Laughlan.

'Brother,' he said, 'do you not think we should offer up a prayer?'

'What for?' asked Peter, standing in his shirt sleeves, a rope in his hands and mud from head to foot.

'For? Why, for rain, brother,' replied the parson, a bit surprised.

Peter held up his finger and said 'Listen!'

Now, with a big mob of travelling stock camped on the plain at night, there is always a lowing, soughing or moaning sound, a sound like that of the sea on the shore at a little distance; and, altogether, it might be called the sigh or yawn of a big mob in camp. But the long, low moaning of cattle dying of hunger and thirst on the hot

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barren plain in a drought is altogether different, and, at night, there is something awful about it—you couldn't describe it. This is what Peter M'Laughlan heard.

'Do you hear that?' he asked the other preacher.

The little parson said he did. Perhaps *he* only heard the weak lowing of cattle.

'Do you think that God will hear us when He does not hear *that*?' asked Peter.

The parson stared at him for a moment and then got into his buggy and drove away, greatly shocked and deeply offended. But, later on, over tea at the homestead, he said that he felt sure that that 'unfortunate man,' Peter M'Laughlan, was not in his right mind; that his wandering, irregular life, or the heat, must have affected him.

I well remember the day when I first heard Peter M'Laughlan preach. I was about seventeen then. We used sometimes to attend service held on Sunday afternoon, about once a month, in a little slab-and-bark school-house in the scrub off the main road, three miles or so from our selection, in a barren hole amongst the western ridges of the Great Dividing Range. School was held in this hut for a few weeks or a few months now and again, when a teacher could be got to stay there and teach, and cook for himself, for a pound a week, more or less contributed by the parents. A parson from the farming town to the east, or the pastoral town over the ridges to the west, used to come in his buggy when it didn't rain and wasn't too hot to hold the service.

I remember this Sunday. It was a blazing hot day towards the end of a long and fearful drought which ruined many round there. The parson was expected, and a good few had come to 'chapel' in spring carts, on horseback, and on foot; farmers and their wives and sons and daughters. The children had been brought here to Sunday-school, taught by some of the girls, in the morning. I can see it all now quite plain: The one-roomed hut, for it was

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no more, with the stunted blue-grey gum scrub all round. The white, dusty road, so hot that you could cook eggs in the dust. The horses tied up, across the road, in the supposed shade under clumps of scraggy saplings along by the fence of a cattle-run. The little crowd outside the hut: Selectors in washed and mended tweeds, some with paper collars, some wearing starched and ironed white coats, and in blucher boots, greased or blackened, or the young men wearing 'larstins' (elastic-side boots). The women and girls in prints and cottons (or cheap 'alpaca,' etc.), and a bright bit of ribbon here and there amongst the girls. The white heat blazed everywhere, and 'dazzled' across light-coloured surfaces—dead white trees, fence posts, sand heaps, etc., like an endless swarm of bees passing in the sun's glare. And over above the dry box-scrub-covered ridges, the great Granite Peak, glaring like a molten mass.

The people didn't like to go inside out of the heat and sit down before the minister came. The wretched hut was a rough school, sometimes with a clay fireplace where the teacher cooked, and a corner screened off with sacking where he had his bunk; it was a camp for tramps at other times, or lizards and 'possums, but to-day it was a house of God, and as such the people respected it.

The town parson didn't turn up. Perhaps he was unwell, or maybe the hot, dusty ten-mile drive was too much for him to face. One of the farmers, who had tried to conduct service on a previous occasion on which the ordained minister had failed us, had broken down in the middle of it, so he was out of the question. We waited for about an hour, and then who should happen to ride along but Peter M'Laughlan, and one or two of the elder men asked him to hold service. He was on his way to see a sick friend at a sheep-station over the ridges, but he said that he could spare an hour or two. (Nearly every man who was sick, either in stomach or pocket, was a friend of Peter M'Laughlan.) Peter tied up his

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horse under a bush shed at the back of the hut, and we followed him in.

The 'school' had been furnished with a rough deal table and a wooden chair for 'the teacher,' and with a few rickety desks and stools cadged from an old 'provisional' school in town when the new public school was built; and the desks and stools had been fastened to the floor to strengthen them; they had been made for 'infant' classes, and youth out our way ran to length. But when grown men over six feet high squeezed in behind the desks and sat down on the stools the effect struck me as being ridiculous. In fact, I am afraid that on the first occasion it rather took my attention from the sermon, and I remember being made very uncomfortable by a school chum, Jack Barnes, who took a delight in catching my eye and winking or grinning. He could wink without changing a solemn line in his face and grin without exploding, and I couldn't. The boys usually sat on seats, slabs on blocks of wood, along the wall at the far end of the room, which was comfortable, for they had a rest for their backs. One or two of the boys were nearing six feet high, so they could almost rest their chins on their knees as they sat. But I squatted with some of my tribe on a stool along the wall by the teacher's table, and so could see most of the congregation.

Above us bare tie-beams and the round sapling rafters (with the bark still on), and the inner sides of the sheets of stringy bark that formed the roof. The slabs had been lined with sacking at one time, but most of it had fallen or dry-rotted away; there were wide cracks between the slabs and we could see the white glare of sunlight outside, with a strip of dark shade, like a deep trench in the white ground, by the back wall. Someone had brought a canvas water-bag and hung it to the beam on the other side of the minister's table, with a pint-pot over the tap, and the drip, drip from the bag made the whole place seem cooler.

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I studied Peter M'Laughlan first. He was dressed in washed and mended tweed vest and trousers, and had on a long, light-coloured coat of a material which we called 'Chinese silk.' He wore a 'soft' cotton shirt with collar attached, and blucher boots.

He gave out a hymn in his quiet, natural way, said a prayer, gave out another hymn, read a chapter from the Bible, and then gave out another hymn. They liked to sing, out in those places. The Southwicks used to bring a cranky little harmonium in the back of their old dog-cart, and Clara Southwick used to accompany the hymns. She was a very pretty girl, fair, and could play and sing well. I used to think she had the sweetest voice I ever heard—But—ah, well!—

Peter didn't sing himself, at first. I got an idea that he couldn't. While they were singing he stood loosely, with one hand in his trouser pocket, scratching his beard with his hymn book, and looking as if he were thinking things over, and only rousing himself to give another verse. He forgot to give it once or twice, but we got through all right. I noticed the wife of one of the men who had asked Peter to preach looking rather black at her husband, and I reckoned that he'd get it hotter than the weather on the way home.

Then Peter stood up and commenced to preach. He stood with both hands in his pockets, at first, his coat ruffled back, and there was the stem of a clay pipe sticking out of his waistcoat pocket. The pipe fascinated me for a while, but after that I forgot the pipe and was fascinated by the man. Peter's face was one that didn't strike you at first with its full strength, it grew on you; it grew on me, and before he had done preaching I thought it was the noblest face I had ever seen.

He didn't preach much of hope in this world. How could he? The drought had been blazing over these districts for nearly a year, with only a shower now and again,

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which was a mockery—scarcely darkening the baked ground. Wheat crops came up a few inches and were parched by the sun or mown for hay, or the cattle turned on them; and last year there had been rust and smut in the wheat. And, on top of it all, the dreadful cattle plague, pleuro-pneumonia, had somehow been introduced into the district. One big farmer had lost fifty milkers in a week.

Peter M'Laughlan didn't preach much of hope in this world; how could he? There were men there who had slaved for twenty, thirty, forty years; worked as farmers have to work in few other lands — first to clear the stubborn bush from the barren soil, then to fence the ground, and manure it, and force crops from it—and for what? There was Cox, the farmer, starved off his selection after thirty years and going out-back with his drays to work at tank-sinking for a squatter. There was his eldest son going shearing or droving—anything he could get to do—a stoop-shouldered, young-old man of thirty. And behind them, in the end, would be a dusty patch in the scrub, a fence post here and there, and a pile of chimney stones and a hard-wood slab or two where the hut was—for thirty hard years of the father's life and twenty of the son's.

I forget Peter's text, if he had a text; but the gist of his sermon was that there was a God — there was a Heaven! And there were men there listening who needed to believe these things. There was old Ross from across the Creek, old, but not sixty, a hard man. Only last week he had broken down and fallen on his knees on the baked sods in the middle of his ploughed ground and prayed for rain. His frightened boys had taken him home, and later on, the same afternoon, when they brought news of four more cows down with 'the pleuro' in an outer paddock, he had stood up outside his own door and shaken his fist at the brassy sky and cursed high Heaven to the terror of his family, till his brave, sun-browned wife dragged him in-

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side and soothed him. And Peter M'Laughlan knew all about this.

Ross's family had the doctor out to him, and persuaded him to come to church this Sunday. The old man sat on the front seat, stooping forward, with his elbow resting on the desk and his chin on his hand, bunching up his beard over his mouth with his fingers and staring gloomily at Peter with dark, piercing eyes from under bushy eyebrows, just as I've since seen a Scotchman stare at Max O'Rell all through a humorous lecture called 'A Nicht wi' Sandy.'

Ross's right hand resting on the desk was very eloquent: horny, scarred and knotted at every joint, with broken, twisted nails, and nearly closed, as though fitted to the handle of an axe or a spade. Ross was an educated man (he had a regular library of books at home), and perhaps that's why he suffered so much.

Peter preached as if he were speaking quietly to one person only, but every word was plain and every sentence went straight to someone. I believe he looked every soul in the eyes before he had done. Once he said something and caught my eye, and I felt a sudden lump in my throat. There was a boy there, a pale, thin, sensitive boy who was eating his heart out because of things he didn't understand. He was ambitious and longed for something different from this life; he'd written a story or two and some rhymes for the local paper; his companions considered him a 'bit ratty' and the grown-up people thought him a 'bit wrong in his head,' idiotic, or at least 'queer.' And during his sermon Peter spoke of 'unsatisfied longings,' of the hope of something better, and said that one had to suffer much and for long years before he could preach or write; and then he looked at that boy. I knew the boy very well; he has risen in the world since then.

Peter spoke of the life we lived, of the things we knew and used names and terms that we used. 'I don't know whether it was a blanky sermon or a blanky lecture,' said

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long swanky Jim Bullock afterwards, 'but it was straight and hit some of us hard. It hit me once or twice, I can tell yer.' Peter spoke of our lives: 'And there is beauty—even in this life and in this place,' he said. 'Nothing is wasted—nothing is without reason. There is beauty even in this place—'

I noticed something like a hint of a hard smile on Ross's face; he moved the hand on the desk and tightened it.

'Yes,' said Peter, as if in answer to Ross's expression and the movement of his hand, 'there is beauty in this life here. After a good season, and when the bush is tall and dry, when the bush fires threaten a man's crop of ripened wheat, there are tired men who run and ride from miles round to help that man, and who fight the fire all night to save his wheat—and some of them may have been wrangling with him for years. And in the morning, when the wheat is saved and the danger is past, when the fire is beaten out or turned, there are blackened, grimy hands that come together and grip—hands that have not joined for many a long day.'

Old Palmer, Ross's neighbour, moved uneasily. He had once helped Ross to put a fire out, but they had quarrelled again since. Ross still sat in the same position, looking the hard man he was. Peter glanced at Ross, looked down and thought a while, and then went on again.

'There is beauty even in this life and in this place. When a man loses his farm or his stock, or his crop through no fault of his own, there are poor men who put their hands into their pockets to help him.'

Old Kurtz, over the ridge, had had his stacked crop of wheat in sheaf burned—some scoundrel had put a match to it at night—and the farmers round had collected nearly fifty pounds for him.

'There is beauty even in this life and in this place. In the blazing drought, when the cattle lie down and cannot rise from weakness, neighbours help neighbours to lift

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them. When one man has hay or chaff and no stock, he gives it or sells it cheaply to the poor man who has starving cattle and no fodder.'

I only knew one or two instances of this kind; but Peter was preaching of what man should do as well as what they did.

'When a man meets with an accident, or dies, there are young men who go with their ploughs and horses and plough the ground for him or his widow and put in the crop.'

Jim Bullock and one or two other young men squirmed. They had ploughed old Leonard's land for him when he met with an accident in the shape of a broken leg got by a kick from a horse. They had also ploughed the ground for Mrs Phipps when her husband died, working, by the way, all Saturday afternoon and Sunday, for they were very busy at home at that time.

'There is beauty even in this life and in this place. There are women who were friends in girlhood and who quarrelled bitterly over a careless word, an idle tale, or some paltry thing, who live within a mile of each other and have not spoken for years; yet let one fall ill, or lose husband or child, and the other will hurry across to her place and take off her bonnet and tuck up her sleeves, and set to work to help straighten things, and they will kiss, and cry in each other's arms, and be sisters again.'

I saw tears in the eyes of two hard and hard-faced women I knew; but they were smiling to each other through their tears.

'And now,' said Peter, 'I want to talk to you about some other things. I am not preaching as a man who has been taught to preach comfortably, but as a man who has learned in the world's school. I know what trouble is. Men,' he said, still speaking quietly, 'and women too! I have been through trouble as deep as any of yours—perhaps deeper. I know how you toil and suffer, I know what

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battles you fight, *I* know. I too fought a battle, perhaps as hard as any you fight. I carry a load and am fighting a battle still.' His eyes were very haggard just then. 'But this is not what I wanted to talk to you about. I have nothing to say against a young man going away from this place to better himself, but there are young men who go out-back shearing or droving, young men who are good-hearted but careless, who make cheques, and spend their money gambling or drinking and never think of the old folk at home until it is too late. They never think of the old people, alone, perhaps, in a desolate hut on a worked-out farm in the scrub.'

Jim Bullock squirmed again. He had gone out-back last season and made a cheque, and lost most of it on horse-racing and cards.

'They never think—they cannot think how, perhaps, long years agone in the old days, the old father, as a young man, and his brave young wife, came out here and buried themselves in the lonely Bush and toiled for many years, trying—it does not matter whether they failed or not—trying to make homes for their children; toiled till the young man was bowed and grey, and the young wife brown and wrinkled and worn out. Exiles they were in the early days—boy-husbands and girl-wives some of them, who left their native lands, who left all that was dear, that seemed beautiful, that seemed to make life worth living, and sacrificed their young lives in drought and utter loneliness to make homes for their children. I want you young men to think of this. Some of them came from England, Ireland, Bonnie Scotland.' (Ross straightened up and let his hands fall loosely on his knees.) 'Some from Europe—your foreign fathers—some from across the Rhine in Germany.' (We looked at old Kurtz. He seemed affected.)

Then Peter paused for a moment and blinked thoughtfully at Ross, then he took a drink of water. I can see now that the whole thing was a battle between Peter

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M'Laughlan and Robert Ross—Scot met Scot. 'It seemed to me,' Jim Bullock said afterwards, 'that Peter was only tryin' to make some on us blanky well blubber.'

'And there are men,' Peter went on, 'who have struggled and suffered and failed, and who have fought and failed again till their tempers are spoiled, until they grow bitter. They go in for self-pity, and self-pity leads to moping and brooding and madness; self-pity is the most selfish and useless thing on the face of God's earth. It is cruel, it is deadly, both to the man and to those who love him, and whom he ought to love. His load grows heavier daily in his imagination, and he sinks down until it is in him to curse God and die. He ceases to care for or to think of his children who are working to help him.' (Ross's sons were good, steady, hard-working boys.) 'Or the brave wife who has been so true to him for many hard years, who left home and friends and country for his sake. Who bears up in the blackest of times, and persists in looking at the bright side of things for his sake; who has suffered more than he if he only knew it, and suffers now, through him and because of him, but who is patient and bright and cheerful while her heart is breaking. He thinks she does not suffer, that she cannot suffer as a man does. My God! he doesn't know. He has forgotten in her the bright, fresh-faced, loving lassie he loved and won long years agone —long years agone—'

There was a sob, like the sob of an over-ridden horse as it sinks down broken-hearted, and Ross's arms went out on the desk in front of him, and his head went down on them. He was beaten.

He was steered out gently with his wife on one side of him and his eldest son on the other.

'Don't be alarmed, my friends,' said Peter, standing by the water-bag with one hand on the tap and the pannikin in the other, 'Mr Ross has not been well lately, and the heat has been too much for him.' And he went out after

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Ross. They took him round under the bush shed behind the hut, where it was cooler.

When Peter came back to his place he seemed to have changed his whole manner and tone. 'Our friend, Mr Ross, is much better,' he said. 'We will now sing'—he glanced at Clara Southwick at the harmonium—'we will now sing "Shall we Gather at the River?"' We all knew that hymn; it was an old favourite round there, and Clara Southwick played it well in spite of the harmonium.

And Peter sang—the first and last time I ever heard him sing. I never had an ear for music; but I never before nor since heard a man's voice that stirred me as Peter M'Laughlan's. We stood like emus, listening to him all through one verse, then we pulled ourselves together.

'Shall we gather at the River,
Where bright angels' feet have trod—'

The only 'rivers' round there were barren creeks, the best of them only strings of muddy waterholes, and across the ridge, on the sheep runs, the creeks were dry gutters, with baked banks and beds, and perhaps a mudhole every mile or so, and dead beasts rotting and stinking every few yards.

'Gather with the saints at the River,
That flows by the throne of God.'

Peter's voice trembled and broke. He caught his breath, and his eyes filled. But he smiled then—he stood smiling at us through his tears.

'The beautiful, the beautiful River,
That flows by the throne of God.'

Outside I saw women kiss each other who had been at daggers drawn ever since I could remember, and men shake

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hands silently who had hated each other for years. Every family wanted Peter to come home to tea, but he went across to Ross's, and afterwards down to Kurtz's place, and bled and inoculated six cows or so in a new way, and after tea he rode off over the gap to see his friend.

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HIS BROTHER'S KEEPER

'By his paths through the parched desolation,
Hot rides and the terrible tramps;
By the hunger, the thirst, the privation
Of his work in the furthermost camps;

'By his worth in the light that shall search men
And prove—ay! and justify each—
I place him in front of all Churchmen
Who feel not, who *know* not—but preach!'

The Christ of the Never.

I TOLD you about Peter M'Laughlan, the Bush missionary, and how he preached in the little slab-and-bark school-house in the scrub on Ross's Creek that blazing hot Sunday afternoon long ago, when the drought was ruining the brave farmers all round there and breaking their hearts. And how hard old Ross, the selector, broke down at the end of the sermon, and blubbered, and had to be taken out of church.

I left home and drifted to Sydney, and 'back into the Great North-West where all the rovers go,' and knocked about the country for six or seven years before I met Peter M'Laughlan again. I was young yet, but felt old at times, and there were times, in the hot, rough, greasy shearing shed on blazing days, or in the bare 'men's hut' by the flicker of the stinking slush-lamp at night, or the wretched wayside shanty with its drink-madness and blasphemy, or tramping along the dusty, endless track—there were times when I wished I could fall back with all the experience I'd got, and sit once more in the little slab-and-bark 'chapel' on Ross's Creek and hear Peter M'Laughlan and

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the poor, struggling selectors sing 'Shall We Gather at the River?' and then go out and start life afresh.

My old school chum and Bush mate, Jack Barnes, had married pretty little Clara Southwick, who used to play the portable harmonium in chapel. I nearly broke my heart when they were married, but then I was a young fool. Clara was a year or so older than I, and I could never get away from a boyish feeling of reverence for her, as if she were something above and out of my world. And so, while I was worshipping her in chapel once a month, and at picnics and parties in between, and always at a distance, Jack used to ride up to Southwick's place on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and on other days, and hang his horse up outside, or turn it in the paddock, and argue with old Southwick, and agree with the old woman, and court Clara on the sly. And he got her.

It was at their wedding that I first got the worse for drink.

Jack was a blue-eyed, curly black-haired, careless, popular young scamp; as good-hearted as he was careless. He could ride like a circus monkey, do all kinds of Bush work, add two columns of figures at once, and write like copper-plate.

Jack was given to drinking, gambling and roving. He steadied up when he got married and started on a small selection of his own; but within the year Clara was living in a back skillion of her father's house and Jack was up-country shearing. He was 'ringer'[1] of the shed at Piora Station one season and made a decent cheque; and within a fortnight after the shed 'cut out'[2] he turned up at home in a very bad state from drink and with about thirty shillings in his pockets. He had fallen from his horse in the creek near Southwick's, and altogether he was a nice sort of young husband to go home to poor, heart-broken Clara.

I remember that time well. She stopped me one day as

[1] 'Ringer'—Fastest shearer. [2] 'Cut out'—Finished shearing.

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I was riding past to ask me if I'd seen Jack, and I got off my horse. Her chin and mouth began to twitch and tremble and I saw her eyes filling with tears. She laid her hand on my arm and asked me to promise not to drink with Jack if I met him, but to try and persuade him to come home. And—well, have you, as a man, ever, with one woman that you can't have, and no matter at what time or place, felt a sudden mad longing to take her in your arms and kiss her—and damn the world? I got on my horse again. She must have thought me an ignorant brute, but I felt safer there. And when I thought how I had nearly made a fool of myself, and been a cowardly brute, and a rotten mate to my mate, I rode ten miles to find Jack and get him home.

He straightened up again after a bit and went out and got another shed, and they say that Peter M'Laughlan got hold of him there. I don't know what Peter did to him then—Jack never spoke of it, even to me, his old mate; but, anyway, at the end of the shearing season Jack's cheque came home to Clara in a registered envelope, addressed in Peter's hand-writing, and about a week later Jack turned up a changed man.

He got work as a temporary clerk in the branch Government Land Office at Solong, a pretty little farming town in a circle of blue hills on the banks of a clear, willow-fringed river, where there were rich, black-soil, river-flat farms, and vineyards on the red soil slopes, and blue peaks in the distance. It was a great contrast to Ross's Creek. Jack paid a deposit on an allotment of land, a bit out of town, on the river bank, and built a little weather-board box of a cottage in spare times, and planted roses and grape-vines to hide its ugliness by-and-by. It wasn't much of a place, but Clara was mighty proud of it because it was 'our house.' They were very happy, and she was beginning to feel sure of Jack. She seemed to believe that the miserable old time was all past and gone.

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When the work at the Land's Office gave out, Jack did all sorts of jobs about town, and at last, one shearing season, when there was a heavy clip of wool, and shearers were getting £1 a hundred, he decided to go out-back. I know that Clara was against it, but he argued that it was the only chance for him, and she persuaded herself that she could trust him. I was knocking about Solong at the time, and Jack and I decided to go out together and share his pack-horse between us. He wrote to Beenaway Shed, about three hundred miles north-west in the Great Scrubs, and got pens for both of us.

It was a fine fresh morning when we started; it was in a good season and the country looked grand. When I rode up to Jack's place I saw his horse and pack-horse tied up outside the gate. He had wanted me to come up the evening before and have tea with them and camp at his place for the night. 'Come up! man alive!' he said. 'We'll make you a shake-down!' But I wouldn't; I said I had to meet a chap. Jack wouldn't have understood. I had been up before, but when I saw him and Clara so happy and comfortable, and thought of the past and my secret, and thought of myself, a useless, purposeless, restless, homeless sort of fellow, hanging out at a boarding-house, it nearly broke me up, and I had to have a drink or two afterwards. I often wonder if Clara guessed and understood. You never know how much a woman knows; but—ah, well!

Jack had taken my things home with him and he and Clara had packed them. I found afterwards that she had washed, dried and ironed some collars and handkerchiefs of mine during the night. Clara and Jack came out to the gate, and as I wouldn't go in to have a cup of tea there was nothing for it but to say good-bye. She was dressed in a fresh-looking print blouse and dark skirt, and wore a white hood that fell back from her head; she was a little girl, with sweet, small, freckled features, and red-gold hair,

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and kind, sympathetic grey eyes. I thought her the freshest, and fairest, and daintiest little woman in the district.

I was Jack's mate, so she always treated me as a sort of brother-in-law, and called me by my Christian name. Mates are closer than brothers in the Bush.

I turned my back and pretended to tighten the straps and girths on the pack-horse while she said good-bye to Jack. I heard her speaking earnestly to him, and once I heard her mention Peter M'Laughlan's name. I thought Jack answered rather impatiently. 'Oh, that's all right, Clara,' he said, 'that's all over—past and gone. I wish you would believe it. You promised never to speak of that any more.'

I know how it was. Jack never cared to hear about Peter; he was too ashamed of the past, perhaps; besides, deep down, we feel a sort of resentment towards any reference to a man who has helped or saved us in the past. It's human nature.

Then they spoke in low tones for a while, and then Jack laughed, and kissed her, and said, 'Oh, I'll be back before the time's up.' Then he ran into the house to say good-bye to Mary's sister, who was staying with her, and who was laid up with a sprained ankle.

Then Clara stepped up to me and laid her fingers on my shoulder. I trembled from head to foot and hoped she didn't notice it.

'Joe,' she said, looking at me with her big, searching grey eyes, 'I believe I can trust you. I want you to look after Jack. You know why. Never let him have one drink if you can help it. One drink—the first drink will do it. I want you to promise me that you will never have a drink with Jack, no matter what happens or what he says.'

'I never will,' I said, and I meant it.

'It's the first time he's been away from me since he gave up drinking, and if he comes back all right this time I will

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be sure of him and contented. But, Joe, if he comes back wrong it will kill me; it will break my heart. I want you to promise that if anything happens you will ride or wire for Peter M'Laughlan. I hear he's wool sorting this year at Beenaway Station. Promise me that if anything happens you will ride for Peter M'Laughlan and tell him, no matter what Jack says.'

'I promise,' I said.

She half held out her hand to me, but I kept both mine behind my back. I suppose she thought I didn't notice that she wanted to shake hands on the bargain; but the truth was that my hands shook so, and I didn't want her to notice *that*.

I got on my horse and felt steadier. Then, 'Good-bye Clara'—'Good-bye Jack.' She bore up bravely, but I saw her eyes brimming. Jack got on his horse, and I bent over and shook hands with her. Jack bent down and kissed her while she stood on tip-toe. 'Good-bye, little woman,' he said. 'Cheer up, and I'll be back before you know where you are! You mustn't fret—you know why.' 'Good-bye, Jack!' she was breaking down.

'Come on, Jack!' I said, and we rode off, turning and waving our hats to her as she stood by the gate, looking a desolate little thing, I thought, till we turned down a bend of the road into the river.

As we jogged along with the pack-horse trotting behind us, and the quart-pots and hobble chains jingling on the pack-saddle, I pictured Clara running inside, to cry a while in her sister's arms, and then to bustle round and cheer up, for Jack's sake—and for the sake of something else.

'I'll christen him after you, Joe,' said Jack, later on, when we'd got confidential over our pipes after tea in our first camp. It never seemed to enter his head that there was the ghost of a chance that it might be a girl. 'I'm glad he didn't come along when I was drinking,' he said.

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And as we lay rolled in our blankets under the stars I swore a big oath to myself.

We got along comfortably and reached Beenaway Station in about a week, the day before the shearers' roll-call. Jack never showed the slightest inclination to go into a shanty; and several times we talked about old times and what damned fools we'd been throwing away our money over shanty bars shouting for loafers and cadgers. 'Isn't this ever so much better, Joe?' said Jack, as we lay on our blankets smoking one moonlight night. 'There's nothing in boozing, Joe, you can take it from me. Just you sling it for a year and then look back; you won't want to touch it again. You've been straight for a couple of months. Sling it for good, Joe, before it gets a hold on you, like it did on me.'

. . . . . .

It was the morning after cut-out at Beenaway Shed, and we were glad. We were tired of the rush and roar and rattle and heat and grease and blasphemy of the big, hot, iron machine shed in that dusty patch in the barren scrubs. Swags were rolled up, saddle-bags packed, horses had been rounded up and driven in, the shearers' cook and his mate had had their fight, and about a hundred men—shearers, rouseabouts, wool-washers, etc.—were waiting round the little iron office to get their cheques.

We were about half through when one Bushman said to another, 'Stop your damned swearin', Jim! Here's Peter M'Laughlan!' Peter walked up and the men made way for him and he went into the office. There was always considerably less swearing for a few feet round about where Peter M'Laughlan happened to be working in a shearing shed. It seemed to be an understood thing with the men. He took no advantages, never volunteered to preach at a shed where he was working, and only spoke on Union subjects when the men asked him to. He was 'Rep.' (Shearers' Union Representative) at this shed, but squatters and station managers respected him as much as the men did.

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He seemed much greyer now, but still stood square and straight. And his eyes still looked one through.

When Peter came out and the crowd had cleared away he took Jack aside and spoke to him in a low voice for a few minutes. I heard Jack say, 'Oh, that's all right, Peter! You have my word for it,' and he got on his horse. I heard Peter say the one word, 'Remember!' 'Oh, that's all right,' said Jack, and he shook hands with Peter, shouted, 'Come on, Joe!' and started off with the pack-horse after him.

'I wish I were going down with you, Joe,' said Peter to me, 'but I can't get away till to-morrow. I've got that sick rouseabout on my hands, and I'll have to see him fixed up somehow and started off to the hospital' (the nearest was a hundred miles away). 'And, by the way, I've taken up a collection for him; I want a few shillings from you, Joe. I nearly forgot you. The poor fellow only got in about a fortnight's work, and there's a wife and youngsters in Sydney. I'll be down after you to-morrow. I promised to go to Comesomehow[1] and get the people together and start an agitation for a half-time school there. Anyway, I'll be there by the end of the week. Good-bye, Joe. I must get some more money for the rouser from some of those chaps before they start.'

Comesomehow was a wretched cockatoo settlement, a bit off the track, about 150 miles on our road home, where the settlers lived like savages and the children ran wild. I reckoned that Peter would have his work cut out to start a craving for education in that place.

By saying he'd be there I think he intended to give me a hint, in case anything happened. I believe now that Jack's wife had got anxious and had written to him.

We jogged along comfortably and happily for three or four days, and as we passed shanty after shanty, and town

[1] There is a postal town in New South Wales called 'Come-by-Chance.'

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after town, without Jack showing the slightest inclination to pull up at any of them, I began to feel safe about him.

Then it happened, in the simplest way, as most things of this sort happen if you don't watch close.

The third night it rained, rained heavens hard, and rainy nights can be mighty cold out on those plains, even in mid-summer. Jack and I rigged up a strip of waterproof stuff we had to cover the swags on the pack-horse, but the rain drove in, almost horizontally, and we got wet through, blankets, clothes and all. Jack got a bad cold and coughed fit to break himself; so about daylight, when the rain held up a bit, we packed up and rode on to the next pub, a wretched little weather-board place in the scrub.

Jack reckoned he'd get some stuff for his cold there. I didn't like to speak, but before we reached the place I said, 'You won't touch a drink, Jack.'

'Do you think I'm a blanky fool?' said Jack, and I shut up.

The shanty was kept by a man who went by the name of Thomas, a notorious lamber-down,[1] as I found out afterwards. He was a big, awkward bullock of a man, a selfish, ignorant brute, as anyone might have seen by his face; but he had a loud voice, and adopted a careless, rollicking, hail-fellow-well-met! come-in-and-sit-down-man-alive! clap-you-on-the-back style, which deceived a good many, or which a good many pretended to believe in. His 'missus' was an animal of his own species, but she was duller and didn't bellow.

He had a rather good-looking girl there—I don't know whether she was his daughter or not. They said that when he saw the shearers coming he'd say, 'Run and titivate yourself, Mary; here comes the shearers!'

But what surprised me was that Jack Barnes didn't seem able to see through Thomas; he thought that he was all right, 'a bit of a rough diamond.' There are any amount

[1] 'Lamber-down,' a shanty-keeper who entices cheque-men to drink.

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of scoundrels and swindlers knocking about the world disguised as rough diamonds.

Jack had a fit of coughing when we came in.

'Why, Jack!' bellowed Thomas, 'that's a regular churchyarder you've got. Go in to the kitchen fire and I'll mix you a stiff toddy.'

'No, thank you, Thomas,' said Jack, glancing at me rather sheepishly, I thought. 'I'll have a hot cup of coffee presently, that'll do me more good.'

'Why, man alive, one drink won't hurt you!' said Thomas. 'I know you're on the straight, and you know I'm the last man that 'ud try to get you off it. But you want something for that cold. You don't want to die on the track, do you? What would your missus say? That cough of yours is enough to bust a bullock.'

'Jack isn't drinking, Thomas,' I said rather shortly, 'and neither am I.'

'I'll have a cup of coffee at breakfast,' said Jack; 'thank you all the same, Thomas.'

'Right you are, Jack!' said Thomas. 'Mary!' he roared at the girl, 'chuck yerself about and get breakfast, and make a strong cup of coffee; and I say, missus' (to his wife), 'git some honey and vinegar in a cup, will yer? or see if there's any of that cough stuff left in the bottle. Go into the kitchen, you chaps, and dry yourselves at the fire, you're wringing wet.' Jack went through into the kitchen.

I stepped out to see if the horses were all right, and as I came in again through the bar, Thomas, who had slipped behind the counter, crooked his finger at me and poured out a stiff whisky. 'I thought you might like to have it on the quiet,' he whispered, with a wink.

Now, there was this difference between Jack and me. When I was on the track, and healthy and contented, I could take a drink, or two drinks, and then leave it; or at other times I could drink all day, or all night, and be as happy as a lord, and be mighty sick and repentant all next

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day, and then not touch drink for a week; but if Jack once started, he was a lost man for days, for weeks, for months—as long as his cash or credit lasted. I felt a cold coming on me this morning, and wanted a whisky, so I had a drink with Thomas. Then, of course, I shouted in my turn, keeping an eye out in case Jack should come in. I went into the kitchen and steamed with Jack for a while in front of a big log fire, taking care to keep my breath away from him. Then we went in to breakfast. Those two drinks were all I meant to have, and we were going right on after breakfast.

It was a good breakfast, ham and eggs, and we enjoyed it. The two whiskies had got to work. I hadn't touched drink for a long time. I shouldn't like to say that Thomas put anything in the drink he gave me. Before we started breakfast he put a glass down in front of me and said,—

'There's a good ginger-ale, it will warm you up.'

I tasted it; it was rum-hot. I said nothing. What could I say?

There was some joke about Jack being married and settled and steadied down, and me, his old mate, still on the wallaby; and Mrs Thomas said that I ought to follow Jack's example. And just then I felt a touch of that loneliness that some men feel when an old drinking mate turns teetotaller.

Jack started coughing again, like an old cow with the pleuro.

'That cough will kill you, Jack,' said Thomas. 'Let's put a drop of brandy in your coffee, *that* won't start you, anyhow; it's real "Three Star."' And he reached a bottle from the side-table.

I should have stood up then, for my manhood, for my mate, and for little Clara, but I half rose from my chair, and Jack laughed and said, 'Sit down, Joe, you old fool, you're tanked. I know all about your seeing about the horse and your ginger-ales. It's all right, old man. Do you think I'm going on the booze? Why, I'll have to hold

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you on the horse all day.' I sat down and took up my glass.

'Here's luck, Joe!' said Jack, laughing, and lifting up his cup of coffee with the brandy in it. 'Here's luck, Joe.'

Then suddenly, and as clearly as I ever heard it, came Clara's voice to my ear: 'Promise me, whatever you do, that you will never have a drink with Jack.' And I fel cold and sick to the stomach.

I got up and went out. They thought that the drink had made me sick, but if I'd stayed there another minute I would have tackled Thomas; and I knew that I needed a clear head to tackle a bullock like him. I walked about a bit, and when I came in again Jack and Thomas were in the bar, and Jack had a glass before him.

'Come on, Joe, you old bounder,' said Jack, 'come and have a whisky-and-soda; it will straighten you up.'

'What's that you're drinking, Jack?' I asked.

'Oh, don't be a fool!' said Jack. 'One drink won't hurt me. Do you think I'm going on the booze? Have a soda and straighten up; we must make a start directly.'

I remember we had two or three whiskies, and then suddenly I tackled Thomas, and Jack was holding me back, and laughing and swearing at me at the same time, and I had a tussle with him; and then I was suddenly calmer and sensible, and we were shaking hands ll round, and Jack was talking about just one more spree for the sake of old times.

'A bit of a booze won't hurt me, Joe, you old fool,' he said. 'We'll have one more night of it, for the sake of Old Lang syne, and start at daylight in the morning. You go and see to the horses, it will straighten you up. Take the saddle off and hobble 'em out.'

But I insisted on starting at once, and Jack promised he would. We were gloriously happy for an hour or so, and then I went to sleep.

When I woke it was late in the afternoon. I was very

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giddy and shaky; the girl brought me a whisky-and-soda, and that steadied me. Some more shearers had arrived, and Jack was playing cards with two of them on top of a cask in the bar. Thomas was dead drunk on the floor, or pretending to be so, and his wife was behind the bar. I went out to see to the horses; I found them in a bush yard at the back. The pack-horse was rolling in the mud with the pack-saddle and saddle-bags on. One of the chaps helped me take off the saddles and put them in the harness-room behind the kitchen.

I'll pass over that night. It wouldn't be very edifying to the great, steady-living, sober majority, and the others, the ne'er-do-wells, the rovers, wrecks and failures, will understand only too well without being told—only too well, God help them!

When I woke in the morning I couldn't have touched a drink to save my life. I was fearfully shaky, and swimming about the head, but I put my head over a tub under the pump and got the girl to pump for a while, and then I drank a pint of tea and managed to keep it down, and felt better.

All through the last half of the night I'd kept saying, in a sort of drink nightmare, 'I'll go for Peter M'Laughlan in the morning. I'll go for Peter as soon as I can stand!' and repeating Clara Barnes's words, 'Ride for Peter if anything happens. Ride for Peter M'Laughlan.'

There were drunken shearers, horsemen and swagmen sleeping all over the place, and in all sorts of odd positions; some on the verandah with their heads on their swags, one sitting back against the wall, and one on the broad of his back with his head on the bare boards and his mouth open. There was another horse rolling in its saddle, and I took the saddle off. The horse belonged to an English university man.

I went in to see how Jack was. He was lying in the parlour on a little, worn-out, horse-hair sofa, that might have seen better days in some clean home in the woman-and-girl

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world. He had been drinking and playing cards till early that morning, and he looked awful—he looked as if he'd been boozing for a month.

'See what you've done!' he said, sitting up and glaring at me; then he said, 'Bring me a whisky-and-soda, Joe, for God's sake!'

I got a whisky-and-soda from the girl and took it to him.

I talked to him for a while, and at last he said, 'Well, go and get the horses and we'll start.'

I got the horses ready and brought them round to the front, but by that time he'd had more drink, and he said he wanted to sleep before he started. Next he was playing cards with one of the chaps, and asked me to wait till he'd finished that game. I knew he'd keep promising and humbugging me till there was a row, so at last I got him aside and said,—

'Look here, Jack, I'm going for Peter M'Laughlan—'

'Go to hell!' said Jack.

I put the other horses back in the yard, the saddles in the skillion, got on my horse and rode off. Thomas and the others asked me no questions, they took no notice. In a place like that a man could almost do anything, short of hanging himself, without anyone interfering or being surprised. And probably, if he did hang himself, they'd let him swing for a while to get a taste of it.

Comesomehow was about fifteen miles back on a track off the main road. I reckoned that I could find Peter and bring him on by the afternoon, and I rode hard, sick as I was. I was too sick to smoke.

As it happened, Peter had started early from his last camp and I caught him just as he was turning off into Comesomehow track.

'What's up, Joe?' he asked as I rode up to him—but he could see.

'Jack Barnes is on the booze at Thomas's,' I said.

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Peter just looked right through me. Then he turned his horse's head without a word, and rode back with me. And, after a while, he said, as if to himself,—

'Poor Clara! Poor little lassie!'

By the time we reached the shanty it was well on in the afternoon. A fight was stopped in the first round and voices lowered when the chaps caught sight of us. As Peter walked into the bar one or two drunks straightened themselves and took off their hats with drunken sentiment.

'Where is Jack Barnes, Thomas?' asked Peter, quietly.

'He's in there if you want to see him,' said Thomas, jerking his head towards the parlour.

We went in, and when Peter saw Jack lying there I noticed that swift, haunted look came into his eyes, as if he'd seen a ghost of the past.

He sat down by the sofa to wait until Jack woke. I thought as he sat there that his eyes were like a woman's for sympathy and like a dog's for faithfulness. I was very shaky.

Presently Thomas looked in. 'Is there anything I can do for you, M'Laughlan?' he asked in as civil a tone as he could get to.

'Yes,' said Peter, 'bring me a flask of your best whisky —your own, mind—and a glass.'

'We shall need the whisky for him on the track, Joe,' said Peter, when the flask came. 'Get another glass and a bottle of soda; you want a nip.' He poured out a drink for himself.

'The first thing we've got to do is to get him away; then I'll soon put him on his feet. But we'll let him sleep a while longer. I find I've got business near Solong, and I'm going down with you.'

By-and-by Jack woke up and glared round, and when he caught sight of Peter he just reached for his hands and said, 'Peter! Thank God you've come!' Then he said, 'But I must have a drink first, Peter.'

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'All right, Jack, you shall have a drink,' said Peter; and he gave him a stiff nobbler. It steadied Jack a bit.

'Now listen to me, Jack,' said Peter. 'How much money have you got left?'

'I—I can't think,' said Jack. 'I've got a cheque for twenty pounds here, sewn inside my shirt.'

'Yes; but you drew thirty-six in three cheques. Where's the rest?'

'Thomas has ten,' said Jack, 'and the six—well, the six is gone. I was playing cards last night.'

Peter stepped out into the bar.

'Look here, Thomas,' he said quietly, 'you've got a ten-pounds' cheque from Barnes.'

'I know I have.'

'Well, how much of it does he owe you?'

'The whole, and more.'

'Do you mean to tell me that? He has only been here since yesterday morning.'

'Yes; but he's been shoutin' all round. Look at all these chaps here.'

'They only came yesterday afternoon,' said Peter. 'Here, you had best take this and give me the cheque;' and Peter laid a five-pound note on the bar. Thomas bucked at first, but in the end he handed over the cheque —he had had several warnings from the police. Then he suddenly lost all control over himself; he came round from behind the bar and faced Peter.

'Now, look here, you mongrel parson!' he said. 'What the —— do you mean by coming into my bar and interfering with me. Who the —— are you anyway? A ——!' He used the worst oaths that were used in the Bush. 'Take off your —— coat!' he roared at last, shaping up to Peter.

Peter stepped back a pace and buttoned his coat and threw back his head.

'No need to take off my coat, Thomas,' he said, 'I am ready.' He said it very quietly, but there was a danger-

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signal—a red light in his eyes. He was quiet-voiced but hard-knuckled, as some had reason to know.

Thomas baulked like a bull at a spread umbrella. Jack lurched past me as I stood in the parlour door, but I caught him and held him back; and almost at the same moment a wretched old boozer that we called 'Awful-Example,' who had been sitting huddled, a dirty bundle of rags and beard and hair, in the corner of the bar, struggled to his feet, staggered forward and faced Thomas, looking once again like something that might have been a man. He snatched a thick glass bottle from the counter and held it by the neck in his right hand.

'Stand back, Thomas!' he shouted. 'Lay a hand—lay a finger on Peter M'Laughlan, and I'll smash your head, as sure as there's a God above us and I'm a ruined man!'

Peter took 'Awful' gently by the shoulders and sat him down. 'You keep quiet, old man,' he said; 'nothing is going to happen.' Thomas went round behind the bar muttering something about it not being worth his while to, etc.

'You go and get the horses ready, Joe,' said Peter to me; 'and you sit down, Jack, and keep quiet.'

'He can get the horses,' growled Thomas, from behind the bar, 'but I'm damned if he gets the saddles. I've got them locked up, and I'll something well keep them till Barnes is sober enough to pay me what he owes me.'

Just then a tall, good-looking chap, with dark-blue eyes and a long, light-coloured moustache, stepped into the bar from the crowd on the verandah.

'What's all this, Thomas?' he asked.

'What's that got to do with you, Gentleman-Once?' shouted Thomas.

'I think it's got something to do with me,' said Gentleman-Once. 'Now, look here, Thomas; you can do pretty well what you like with us poor devils, and you know it, but we draw the line at Peter M'Laughlan. If you really

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itch for the thrashing you deserve you must tempt someone else to give it to you.'

'What the —— are you talking about?' snorted Thomas. 'You're drunk or ratty!'

'What's the trouble, M'Laughlan?' asked Gentleman-Once, turning to Peter.

'No trouble at all, Gentleman-Once,' said Peter; 'thank you all the same. I've managed worse men than our friend Thomas. Now, Thomas, don't you think it would pay you best to hand over the key of the harness-room and have done with this nonsense? I'm a patient man—a very patient man—but I've not always been so, and the old blood comes up sometimes, you know.'

Thomas couldn't stand this sort of language, because he couldn't understand it. He threw the key on the bar and told us to clear out.

We were all three very quiet riding along the track that evening. Peter gave Jack a nip now and again from the flask, and before we turned in in camp he gave him what he called a soothing draught from a little medicine chest that he carried in his saddle-bag. Jack seemed to have got rid of his cough; he slept all night, and in the morning, after he'd drunk a pint of mutton broth that Peter had made in one of the billies, he was all right—except that he was quiet and ashamed. I had never known him to be so quiet, and for such a length of time, since we were boys together. He had learned his own weakness; he'd lost all his cocksureness. I know now just exactly how he felt. He felt as if his sober year had been lost and he would have to live it all over again.

Peter didn't preach. He just jogged along and camped with us as if he were an ordinary, every-day mate. He yarned about all sorts of things. He could tell good yarns, and when he was fairly on you could listen to him all night. He seemed to have been nearly all over the world. Peter never preached except when he was asked to hold

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service in some Bush pub, station-homestead or Bush church. But in a case like ours he had a way of telling a little life story, with something in it that hit the young man he wanted to reform, and hit him hard. He'd generally begin quietly, when we were comfortable with our pipes in camp after tea, with 'I once knew a young man—' or 'That reminds me of a young fellow I knew—' and so on. You never knew when he was going to begin, or when he was going to hit you. In our last camp, before we reached Solong, he told two of his time-fuse yarns. I haven't time to tell them now, but one stuffed up my pipe for a while, and made Jack's hand tremble when he tried to light his. I'm glad it was too dark to see our faces. We lay a good while afterwards, rolled in our blankets, and couldn't get to sleep for thinking; but Peter seemed to fall asleep as soon as he turned in.

Next day he told Jack not to tell Clara that he'd come down with us. He said he wouldn't go right into Solong with us; he was going back along another road to stay a day or two with an old friend of his.

When we reached Solong we stopped on the river bank just out of sight of Jack's house. Peter took the ten-pound cheque from his pocket and gave it to Jack. Jack hadn't seen Peter give the shanty-keeper the five-pound note.

'But I owed Thomas something,' said Jack, staring. 'However did you manage to get the cheque out of him?'

'Never mind, Jack, I managed,' said Peter.

Jack sat silent for a while, then he began to breathe hard.

'I don't know what to say, Peter.'

'Say nothing, Jack. Only promise me that you will give Clara the cheques as soon as you go home, and let her take care of the cash for a while.'

'I will,' said Jack.

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Jack looked down at the ground for a while, then he lifted his head and looked Peter in the eyes.

'Peter,' he said, 'I can't speak. I'm ashamed to make a promise; I've broken so many. I'll try to thank you in a year's time from now.'

'I ask for no promises,' said Peter, and he held out his hand. Jack gripped it.

'Aren't you coming home with me, Joe?' he asked.

'No,' I said; 'I'll go into town. See you in the morning.'

Jack rode on. When he got along a piece Peter left his horse and moved up to the head of the lane to watch Jack, and I followed. As Jack neared the cottage we saw a little figure in a cloak run out to the front gate. She had heard the horses and the jingle of the camp-ware on the pack-saddle. We saw Jack jump down and take her in his arms. I looked at Peter, and as he watched them, something, that might have been a strange look of the old days, came into his eyes.

He shook hands with me. 'Good-bye, Joe.'

He rode across the river again. He took the track that ran along the foot of the spurs by tbe river, and up over a gap in the curve of blue hills, and down and out west towards the Big Scrubs. And as he rounded the last spur, with his pack-horse trotting after him, I thought he must have felt very lonely. And I felt lonely too.

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FROM THE BUSH

THE Channel fog has lifted—
And see where we have come!
Round all the world we've drifted,
A hundred years from 'home.'
The fields our parents longed for—
Ah! we shall ne'er know how—
The wealth that they were wronged for
We'll see as strangers now!

1

The Dover cliffs have passed on—
In morning light aglow—
That our fathers looked their last on
A weary time ago.
Now grin, and grin your bravest!
We need be strong to fight;
For you go home to picture
And I go home to write!

2

Hold up your head in England,
Tread firm on London streets;
We come from where the strong heart
Of all Australia beats!

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Hold up your head in England
However poor you roam!
For no men are your betters
Who never sailed from home!

3

From a hundred years of hardships—
'Tis ours to tell the cost—
From a thousand miles of silence
Where London should be lost;
From where the glorious sunset
On sweeps of mulga glows—
Ah! we know more than England,
And more than Europe knows!

4

Hold up your head in London,
However poor you come,
For no man is your better
Who never sailed from home!
Our 'home' and foreign fathers,
Where none but men dared go,
Have done more for the White Man
Than England e'er shall know!

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HEED NOT

HEED not the cock-sure tourist,
Seeing with English eyes;
Stroked at the banquet table
Still, with the old stock lies—
Pet of a social circle,
Guest in a garden fair—
Free of the first-class carriage—
He learns no Australian there.

Heed not the Southern humbugs
By the first saloons who come—
From his work in the wide, hot scrub-lands
The Australian goes not home.
Give them the toadies' knighthood,
Fit for the souls they've got;
Fear not to shame Australia
For Australia knows them not.

Heed not the Sydney 'dailies,'
Naught for the land they do;
Heed not the Melbourne street crowd,
For they know no more than you!
Pent in the coastal cities,
Still on the old-world track—
They know naught of Australia,
Of the heart of the great Out-Back!

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But wait for the voice that gathers
  Strength by the western creeks!
Heed ye the Out-Back shearers—
  List when the Great Bush speaks!
Heed ye the black-sheep, working
  His own salvation free—
And, oh, heed ye the sons of the exiles
  When they speak of the things to be!

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AS FAR AS YOUR RIFLES COVER

DO you think, you slaves of a thousand years to poverty, wealth and pride,
You can crush the spirit that has been free in a land that's new and wide?
When you've scattered the last of the farmer bands, and the war for a while is over,
You will hold the land—ay, you'll hold the land—the land that your rifles cover.

Till your gold has levelled each mountain range where a wounded man can hide,
Till your gold has lighted the moonless night on the plains where the rebels ride;
Till the future is proved, and the past is bribed from the son of the land's dead lover—
You may hold the land—you may hold the land just as far as your rifles cover.

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THE STORY OF 'GENTLEMAN-ONCE'

'They learn the world from black-sheep,
Who know it all too well.'—*Out-Back.*

PETER M'LAUGHLAN, Bush missionary, Joe Wilson and his mate, Jack Barnes, shearers for the present, and a casual swagman named Jack Mitchell, were camped at Cox's Crossing in a bend of Eurunderee Creek.

It was a grassy little flat with gum trees standing clear and clean like a park. At the back was the steep grassy siding of a ridge, and far away across the creek to the south a spur from the Blue Mountain range ran west, with a tall, blue granite peak showing clear in the broad moonlight, yet dream-like and distant over the sweeps of dark green bush.

There was the jingle of hobble-chains and a crunching at the grass where the horses moved in the soft shadows amongst the trees. Up the creek on the other side was a surveyors' camp, and from there now and again came the sound of a good voice singing verses of old songs; and later on the sound of a violin and a cornet being played, sometimes together and sometimes each on its own.

Wilson and Barnes were on their way home from shearing out-back in the great scrubs at Beenaway Shed. They had been rescued by Peter M'Laughlan from a wayside shanty where they had fallen, in spite of mutual oaths and past promises, sacred and profane, because they had got

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wringing wet in a storm on the track and caught colds, and had been tempted to take just one drink.

They were in a bad way, and were knocking down their cheques beautifully when Peter M'Laughlan came along. He rescued them and some of their cash from the soulless shanty-keeper, and was riding home with them, on some pretence, because he had known them as boys, because Joe Wilson had a vein of poetry in him—a something in sympathy with something in Peter; because Jack Barnes had a dear little girl-wife who was much too good for him, and who was now anxiously waiting for him in the pretty little farming town of Solong amongst the western spurs. Because, perhaps, of something in Peter's early past which was a mystery. Simply and plainly because Peter M'Laughlan was the kindest, straightest and truest man in the West—a 'white man.'

They all knew Mitchell and welcomed him heartily when he turned up in their camp, because he was a pathetic humorist and a kindly cynic—a 'joker' or 'hard case' as the Bushmen say.

Peter was about fifty and the other three were young men.

There was another man in camp who didn't count and was supposed to be dead. Old Danny Quinn, champion 'beer-chewer' of the district, was on his way out, after a spree, to one of Rouse's stations, where, for the sake of past services—long past—and because of old times, he was supposed to be working. He had spent his last penny a week before and had clung to his last-hope hotel until the landlord had taken him in one hand and his swag in the other and lifted them clear of the verandah. Danny had blundered on, this far, somehow, he was the last in the world who could have told how, and had managed to light a fire; then he lay with his head on his swag and enjoyed his own particularly lurid little hell undisturbed until Peter M'Laughlan and his mates came along. Peter gave him

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nips of whisky in judicious doses and at reasonable intervals, and later on a tot of mutton broth, which he made in one of the billies.

It was after tea. Peter sat on a log by the fire with Joe and Jack Mitchell on one side and Jack Barnes on the other. Jack Mitchell sat on the grass with his back to the log, his knees drawn up, and his arms abroad on them: his most comfortable position and one which seemed to favour the flow of his philosophy. They talked of Bush things or reflected, sometimes all three together, sometimes by turns.

From the surveyors' camp,—

'I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn—'

The breeze from the west strengthened and the voice was blown away.

'That chap seems a bit sentimental but he's got a good voice,' said Mitchell. Then presently he remarked, round his pipe,—

'I wonder if old Danny remembers?'

And presently Peter said quietly, as if the thought had just occurred to him,—

'By the way, Mitchell, I forgot to ask after your old folk. I knew your father, you know.'

'Oh, they're all right, Peter, thank you.'

'Heard from them lately?' asked Peter, presently, in a lazy tone.

Mitchell straightened himself up. 'N—no. To tell the truth, Peter, I haven't written for—I don't know how long.'

Peter smoked reflectively.

'I remember your father well, Jack,' he said. 'He was a big-hearted man.'

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Old Danny was heard remonstrating loudly with spirits from a warmer clime than Australia, and Peter stepped over to soothe him.

'I thought I'd get it, directly after I opened my mouth,' said Mitchell. 'I suppose it will be your turn next, Joe.'

'I suppose so,' said Joe, resignedly.

The wind fell.

'I remember, I remember,
And it gives me little joy,
To think I'm further off from heaven,
Than when I was a boy!'

When Peter came back another thought seemed to have occurred to him.

'How's your mother getting on, Joe?' he asked. 'She shifted to Sydney after your father died, didn't she?'

'Oh, she's getting on all right!' said Joe, without elaboration.

'Keeping a boarding-house, isn't she?'

'Yes,' said Joe.

'Hard to make ends meet, I suppose?' said Peter. 'It's almost a harder life than it could have been on the old Selection, and there's none of the old independence about it. A woman like your mother must feel it, Joe.'

'Oh, she's all right,' said Joe. 'She's used to it by this time. I manage to send her a few pounds now and again. I send her all I can,' he added resentfully.

Peter sat corrected for a few moments. Then he seemed to change the subject.

'It's some time since you were in Sydney last, isn't it, Joe?'

'Yes, Peter,' said Joe. 'I haven't been there for two years. I never did any good there. I'm far better knocking about out-back.'

There was a pause.

'Some men seem to get on better in one place, some in

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another,' reflected, Mitchell, lazily. 'For my part, I seem to get on better in another.'

Peter blinked, relit his pipe with a stick from the fire and reflected.

The surveyor's song had been encored:—

'I remember, I remember—'

Perhaps Peter remembered. Joe did, but there were no vines round the house where he was born, only drought and dust, and raspy voices raised in recrimination, and hardship most times.

'I remember,' said Peter, quietly, 'I remember a young fellow at home in the old country. He had every advantage. He had a first-class education, a great deal more money than he needed—almost as much as he asked for, and nearly as much freedom as he wanted. His father was an English gentleman and his mother an English lady. They were titled people, if I remember rightly. The old man was proud, but fond of his son; he only asked him to pay a little duty or respect now and again. We don't understand these things in Australia—they seem formal and cold to us. The son paid his respects to his father occasionally—a week or so before he'd be wanting money, as a rule. The mother was a dear lady. She idolised her son. She only asked for a little show of affection from him, a few days or a week of his society at home now and then—say once in three months. But he couldn't spare her even that—his time was taken up so much in fashionable London and Paris and other places. He would give the world to be able to take his proud, soft old father's hand now and look into his eyes as one man who understands another. He would be glad and eager to give his mother twelve months out of the year if he thought it would make her happier. It has been too late for more than twenty years.

Old Danny called for Peter.

Mitchell jerked his head approving and gave a sound

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like a sigh and chuckle conjoined, the one qualifying the other.

'I told you you'd get it, Joe,' he said.

'I don't see how it hits me,' said Joe.

'But it hit all the same, Joe.'

'Well, I suppose it did,' said Joe, after a short pause.

'He wouldn't have hit you so hard if you hadn't tried to parry,' reflected Mitchell. 'It's your turn now, Jack.'

Jack Barnes said nothing.

'Now I know that Peter would do anything for a woman or child, or an honest, straight, hard-up chap,' said Mitchell, straightening out his legs and folding his arms, 'but I can't quite understand his being so partial to drunken scamps and vagabonds, black-sheep and ne'er-do-wells. He's got a tremendous sympathy for drunks. He'd do anything to help a drunken man. Ain't it marvellous? It's my private opinion that Peter must have been an awful boozer and scamp in his time.'

The other two only thought. Mitchell was privileged. He was a young man of freckled, sandy complexion, and quizzical grey eyes. 'Sly Joker' 'could take a rise out of anyone on the quiet;' 'You could never tell when he was getting at you;' 'Face of a born comedian,' as Bushmen said of Mitchell. But he would probably have been a dead and dismal failure on any other stage than that of wide Australia.

Peter came back and they sat and smoked, and maybe they reflected along four very different back-tracks for a while.

The surveyor started to sing again:—

'I have heard the mavis singing
Her love-song to the morn,
I have seen the dew-drop clinging
To the rose just newly born.'

They smoked and listened in silence all through to the end. It was very still. The full moon was high. The

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long white slender branches of a box-tree stirred gently overhead; the she-oaks in the creek sighed as they are always sighing, and the southern peak seemed ever so far away.

'That has made me thine for ever!
Bonny Mary of Argyle.'

'Blarst my pipe!' exclaimed Mitchell, suddenly. 'I beg your pardon, Peter. My pipe's always getting stuffed up,' and he proceeded to shell out and clear his pipe.

The breeze had changed and strengthened. They heard the violin playing 'Annie Laurie.'

'They must be having a Scotch night in that camp to-night,' said Mitchell. The voice came again:—

'Maxwelton Braes are bonny—
Where early fa's the dew,
For 'twas there that Annie Laurie
Gie me her promise true—'

Mitchell threw out his arm impatiently.

'I wish they wouldn't play and sing those old songs,' he said. 'They make you think of damned old things. I beg your pardon, Peter.'

Peter sat leaning forward, his elbows resting on his knees and his hands fingering his cold pipe nervously. His sad eyes had grown haggard and haunted. It is in the hearts of exiles in new lands that the old songs are felt.

'Take no thought of the morrow, Mitchell,' said Peter, abstractedly. 'I beg your pardon, Mitchell. I mean—

'That's all right, Peter,' said Mitchell. 'You're right; to-morrow is the past, as far as I'm concerned.'

Peter blinked down at him as if he were a new species.

'You're an odd young man, Mitchell,' he said. 'You'll have to take care of that head of yours or you'll be found hanging by a saddle strap to a leaning tree on a lonely track, or find yourself in a lunatic asylum before you're forty-five.'

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'Or else I'll be a great man,' said Mitchell. 'But—ah, well!'

Peter turned his eyes to the fire and smiled sadly.

'Not enjoyment and not sorrow, is our destined end or way,' he repeated to the fire.

'But we get there just the same,' said Mitchell, 'destined or not.'

'But to live, that each to-morrow,
Finds us further than to-day!'

'Why, that just fits my life, Peter,' said Mitchell. 'I might have to tramp two or three hundred miles before I get a cut[1] or a job, and if to-morrow didn't find me nearer than to-day I'd starve or die of thirst on a dry stretch.'

'Why don't you get married and settle down, Mitchell?' asked Peter, a little tired. 'You're a teetotaller.'

'If I got married I couldn't settle down,' said Mitchell. 'I reckon I'd be the loneliest man in Australia.' Peter gave him a swift glance. 'I reckon I'd be single no matter how much married I might be. I couldn't get the girl I wanted, and—ah, well!'

Mitchell's expression was still quaintly humorous round the lower part of his face, but there was a sad light in his eyes. The strange light as of the old dead days, and he was still young.

The cornet had started in the surveyors' camp.

'Their blooming tunes seem to fit in just as if they knew what we were talking about,' remarked Mitchell.

The cornet:—

'You'll break my heart, you little bird,
That sings upon the flowering thorn—
Thou minds't me of departed joys,
Departed never to return.'

'Damn it all,' said Mitchell, sitting up, 'I'm getting

[1] Cut—a pen, or 'stand' in a shearing shed.

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sentimental.' Then, as if voicing something that was troubling him, 'Don't you think a woman pulls a man down as often as she lifts him up, Peter?'

'Some say so,' said Peter.

'Some say so, and they write it, too,' said Mitchell. 'Sometimes it seems to me as if women were fated to drag a man down ever since Adam's time. If Adam hadn't taken his wife's advice—but there, perhaps he took her advice a good many times and found it good, and, just because she happened to be wrong this time, and to get him into a hole, the sons of Adam have never let the daughters of Eve hear the last of it. That's human nature.'

Jack Barnes, the young husband, who was suffering a recovery, had been very silent all the evening. 'I think a man's a fool to always listen to his wife's advice,' he said, with the unreasonable impatience of a man who wants to think while others are talking. 'She only messes him up, and drives him to the devil as likely as not, and gets a contempt for him in the end.'

Peter gave him a surprised, reproachful look, and stood up. He paced backwards and forwards on the other side of the fire, with his hands behind his back for a while; then he came and settled himself on the log again and filled his pipe.

'Yes,' he said, 'a man can always find excuses for himself when his conscience stings him. He puts mud on the sting. Man at large is beginning all over the world to rake up excuses for himself; he disguises them as "Psychological studies," and thinks he is clean and clever and cultured, or he calls 'em problems—the sex-problem, for instance, and thinks he is brave and fearless.'

Danny was in trouble again, and Peter went to him. He complained that when he lay down he saw the faces worse, and he wanted to be propped up somehow, so Peter got a pack-saddle and propped the old man's shoulders up with that.

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'I remember,' Peter began, when he came back to the fire, 'I remember a young man who got married—'

Mitchell hugged himself. He knew Jack Barnes. He knew that Jack had a girl-wife who was many times too good for him; that Jack had been wild, and had nearly broken her heart, and he had guessed at once that Jack had broken out again, and that Peter M'Laughlan was shepherding him home. Mitchell had worked as mates with Jack, and liked him because of the good heart that was in him in spite of all; and, because he liked him, he was glad that Jack was going to get a kicking, so to speak, which might do him good. Mitchell saw it coming, as he said afterwards, and filled his pipe, and settled himself comfortably to listen.

'I remember the case of a naturally selfish young man who got married,' said Peter. 'He didn't know he was selfish; in fact, he thought he was too much the other way —but that doesn't matter now. His name was—well, we'll call him—we'll call him "Gentleman-Once."'

'Do you mean "Gentleman-Once" that we saw drinking back at Thomas's shanty?' asked Joe.

'No,' said Peter, 'not him. There have been more than one in the Bush who went by the nickname of "Gentleman-Once." I knew one or two. It's a big clan, the clan of Gentleman-Once, and scattered all over the world.'

'By the way,' said Mitchell—'excuse me for interrupting, Peter—but wasn't old Danny, there, a gentleman once? I've heard chaps say he was.'

'I know he was,' said Peter.

'"Gentleman-Once!" Whose talking about Gentleman-Once?' said an awful voice, suddenly and quickly. 'About twenty or thirty year ago I was called Gentleman-Once or Gentleman Jack, I don't know which—Get out! GET OUT, I say! It's all lies, and you're the devil. There's four devils sitting by the fire. I see them.'

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Two of the four devils by the fire looked round, rather startled.

Danny was sitting up, his awful bloodshot eyes glaring in the firelight, and his ruined head looking like the bloated head of a hairy poodle that had been drowned and dried. Peter went to the old man and soothed him by waving off the snakes and devils with his hands, and telling them to go.

'I've heard Danny on the Gentleman-Once racket before,' remarked Mitchell. 'Seems funny, doesn't it, for a man to be proud of the fact that he was called "Gentleman-Once" about twenty years ago?'

'Seems more awful than funny to me,' said Joe.

'You're right, Joe,' said Mitchell. 'But the saddest things are often funny.'

When Peter came back he went on with his story, and was only interrupted once or twice by Danny waking up and calling him to drive off the snakes, and green and crimson dogs with crocodile heads, and devils with flaming tails, and those unpleasant sorts of things that force their company on boozers and madmen.

'Gentleman-Once,' said Peter, 'he came from the old country with a good education and no character. He disgraced himself and family once too often and came, or was sent, out to Australia to reform. It's a great mistake. If a man is too far gone, or hasn't the strength to live the past down and reform at home, he won't do it in a new country, unless a combination of circumstances compel him to it. A man rises by chance; just as often he falls by chance. Some men fall into the habit of keeping steady and stick to it, for the novelty of it, until they are on their feet and in their sane minds and can look at the past, present and future sensibly. I knew one case— But that's got nothing to do with the story.

'Gentleman-Once came out on the remittance system. That system is fatal in nine cases out of ten. The remittance system is an insult to any manhood that may be left

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in the black-sheep, and an insult to the land he is sent to. The cursed quarterly allowance is a stone round his neck which will drag him down deeper in a new land than he would have fallen at home. You know that remittance men are regarded with such contempt in the Bush that a man seldom admits he is one, save when he's drunk and reckless and wants money or credit. When a ne'er-do-well lands in Melbourne or Sydney without a penny he will probably buck-up and do something for himself. When he lands with money he will probably spend it all in the first few months and then straighten up, because he has to. But when he lands on the remittance system he drinks, first to drown home-sickness. He decides that he'll wait till he gets his next quarter's allowance and then look round. He persuades himself that it's no use trying to do anything: that, in fact, he can't do anything until he gets his money. When he gets it he drifts into one "last" night with chums he has picked up in second and third-rate hotels. He drinks from pure selfishness. No matter what precautions his friends at home take, he finds means of getting credit or drawing on his allowance before it is due—until he is two or three quarters behind. He drinks because he feels happy and jolly and clever and good-natured and brave and honest while he is drinking. Later on he drinks because he feels the reverse of all these things when he is sober. He drinks to drown the past and repentance. He doesn't know that a healthy-minded man doesn't waste time in repenting. He doesn't know how easy it is to reform, and is too weak-willed to try. He gets a muddled idea that the past can't be mended. He finds it easy to get drink and borrow money on the strength of his next quarter's allowance, so he soon gets a quarter or two behind, and sometimes gets into trouble connected with borrowed money. He drifts to the Bush and drinks, to drown the past only. The past grows blacker and blacker until it is a hell without repentance; and often the black-sheep gets to that state when a man

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dreads his sober hours. And the end? Well, you see old Danny there, and you saw old "Awful Example" back at Johnson's shanty—he's worse than Danny, if anything. Sometimes the end comes sooner. I saw a young new-land-new-leaf man dying in a cheap lodging-house in Sydney. He was a school mate of mine, by-the-way. For six weeks he lay on his back and suffered as I never saw a man suffer in this world; and I've seen some bad cases. They had to chloroform him every time they wanted to move him. He had affected to be hard and cynical, and I must say that he played it out to the end. It was a strong character, a strong mind sodden and diseased with drink. He never spoke of home and his people except when he was delirious. He never spoke, even to me, of his mental agony. That was English home training. You young Australians wouldn't understand it; most Bushmen are poets and emotional.

'My old school mate was shifted to the Sydney Hospital at last, and consented to the amputation of one leg. But it was too late. He was gone from the hips down. Drink —third-rate hotel and Bush shanty drink — and low debauchery.'

Jack Barnes drew up his leg and rubbed it surreptitiously. He had 'pins and needles.' Mitchell noticed and turned a chuckle into a grunt.

'Gentleman-Once was a remittance man,' continued Peter. 'But before he got very far he met an Australian girl in a boarding-house. Her mother was the landlady. They were Bush people who had drifted to the city. The girl was pretty, intelligent and impulsive. She pitied him and nursed him. He wasn't known as Gentleman-Once then, he hadn't got far enough to merit the nickname.'

Peter paused. Presently he jerked his head, as if he felt a spasm of pain, and leaned forward to get a stick from the fire to light his pipe.

'Now, there's the girl who marries a man to reform him, and when she has reformed him never lets him hear the last

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of it. Sometimes, as a woman, she drives him back again. But this was not one of that sort of girls. I once held a theory that sometimes a girl who has married a man and reformed him misses in the reformed man the something which attracted her in the careless scamp, the something which made her love him—and so she ceases to love him, and their married life is a far more miserable one than it would have been had he continued drinking. I hold no theory of that kind now. Such theories ruin many married lives.'

Peter jerked his head again as if impatient with a thought, and reached for a fire-stick.

'But that's got nothing to do with the story. When Gentleman-Once reformed his natural selfishness came back. He saw that he had made a mistake. It's a terrible thing for a young man, a few months, perhaps a few weeks after his marriage, to ask himself the question, "Have I made a mistake?" But Gentleman-Once wasn't to be pitied. He discovered that he had married beneath him in intellect and education. Home training again. He couldn't have discovered that he had married beneath him as far as birth was concerned, for his wife's father had been a younger son of an older and greater family than his own— But Gentleman-Once wouldn't have been cad enough to bother about birth. I'll do him that much justice. He discovered, or thought he did, that he and his wife could never have one thought in common; that she couldn't possibly understand him. I'll tell you later on whether he was mistaken or not. He was gloomy most times, and she was a bright, sociable, busy little body. When she tried to draw him out of himself he grew irritable. Besides, having found that they couldn't have a thought in common he ceased to bother to talk to her. There are many men who don't bother talking to their wives; they don't think their wives feel it—because the wives cease to complain after a while; they grow tired of trying to make the man realise how they suffer. Gentleman-Once tried his best—according to his lights—

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and weakness. Then he went in for self-pity and all the problems. He liked to brood, and his poor little wife's energy and cheerfulness were wearying to him. He wanted to be left alone. They were both high-spirited, in different ways; she was highly strung and so was he—because of his past life mostly. They quarrelled badly sometimes. Then he drank again and she stuck to him. Perhaps the only time he seemed cheerful and affectionate was when he had a few drinks in him. It was a miserable existence—a furnished room in a cheap lodging-house, and the use of the kitchen.

'He drank alone.

'Now a dipsomaniac mostly thinks he is in the right—except, perhaps, after he has been forced to be sober for a week. The noblest woman in the world couldn't save him—everything she does to reform him irritates him; but a strong friend can save him sometimes—a man who has been through it himself. The poor little wife of Gentleman-Once went through it all. And she stuck to him. She went into low pubs after him.'

Peter shuddered again.

'She went through it all. He swore promises. He'd come home sober and fill her with hope of future happiness, and swear that he'd never take another glass. "And we'll be happy yet, my poor boy," she'd say, "we'll be happy yet. I believe you, I trust you" (she used to call him her "bonny boy" when they were first married). And next night he'd come home worse than ever. And one day he—he struck her!'

Peter shuddered, head and shoulders, like a man who had accidentally smashed his finger.

'And one day he struck her. He was sober when he did it—anyhow he had not taken drink for a week. A man is never sober who gets drunk more than once a week, though he might think he is. I don't know how it happened, but anyway he struck her, and that frightened

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him. He got a billet in the Civil Service up-country. No matter in what town it was. The little wife hoped for six months.

'I think it's a cruel thing that a carelessly selfish young man cannot realise how a sensitive young wife suffers for months after he has reformed. How she hopes and fears, how she dreads the moment he has to leave her, and frets every hour he is away from home—and suffers mental agony when he is late. How the horror of the wretched old past time grows upon her until she dares not think of it. How she listens to his step and voice and watches his face, when he comes home, for a sign of drink. A young man, a mate of mine, who drank hard and reformed, used to take a delight in pretending for a few minutes to be drunk when he came home. He was good-hearted, but dense. He said he only did it to give his wife a pleasant surprise afterwards. I thought it one of the most cruel things I had ever seen.

'Gentleman-Once found that he could not stand the routine of office work and the dull life in that place. He commenced to drink again, and went on till he lost his billet. They had a little boy, a bright little boy, yet the father drank.

'The last spree was a terrible one. He was away from home a fortnight, and in that fortnight he got down as deep as a man could get. Then another man got hold of him and set him on his feet, and straightened him up. The other man was a ruined doctor, a wreck whose devil was morphia. I don't hold that a man's salvation is always in his own hands; I've seen mates pull mates out of hell too often to think that.

'Then Gentleman-Once saw the past as he had never seen it before—he saw hope for the future with it. And he swore an oath that he felt he would keep.

'He suffered from reaction on his way home, and, as he neared the town, a sudden fear, born of his nervous state,

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no doubt, sent a cold, sick emptiness through him: "Was it too late?"

'As he turned into the street where he lived, he noticed a little group of Bush larrikins standing at the corner. And they moved uneasily when they caught sight of him, and, as he passed, they touched and lifted their hats to him. Now he knew that he had lost the respect even of Bush larrikins; and he knew enough of the Bush to know that a Bushman never lifts his hat to a man—only to death, and a woman sometimes. He hurried home and read the truth in his wife's eyes. His little boy was dead. He went down under the blow, and she held his head to her breast and kept saying, "My poor boy, my poor boy!"

'It was he that she meant, not the boy she had lost. She knew him, she understood him better than he did himself, and, heart-broken as she was, she knew how he was going to suffer, and comforted him. "My poor boy, my poor, foolish boy!"

'He mended the past, as far as he could, during the next two years, and she seemed happy. He was very gentle, he was very kind to her. He was happy, too, in a new, strange way. But he had learned what it was to suffer through his own fault, and now he was to learn what it was to suffer through no fault of his own, and without the consolation of saying "I was wrong! I was to blame!" At the end of the two years there was another child, and his wife died.'

The four sat silently smoking until Jack Barnes asked,—

'And what did he do then, Peter?'

'Who?' said Peter, abstractedly.

'Why, Gentleman-Once.'

Peter roused himself.

'Well, I've told the story, and it is about time to turn in,' he said. 'I can't say exactly what Gentleman-Once did when his wife died. He might have gone down to a deeper depth than Danny's. He might have risen higher than he had ever been before. From what I knew of his

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character he would never have gone down an easy slope as Danny has done. He might have dropped plump at first and then climbed up. Anyway, hé had the memory of the last two years to help him.

'Then there's the reformed drunkard who has trained himself to take a drink when he needs it, to drink in moderation—he's the strongest character of all, I think—but it's time to turn in.'

The cornet up the creek was playing a march.

Peter walked across and looked at Danny, who seemed to be sleeping as peacefully as could be expected of him.

Jack Barnes got up and walked slowly down the creek in the moonlight. He wanted to think.

Peter rolled out his blankets on the grass and arranged his saddle-bags for a pillow. Before he turned in Mitchell shook hands with him, a most unusual and unnecessary proceeding in camp. But there's something in the Bush grip which means 'I know,' or 'I understand.'

Joe Wilson rolled out his blankets close to Mitchell's camp; he wanted to enjoy some of Mitchell's quiet humour before he went to sleep, but Mitchell wasn't in a philosophical mood. He wanted to reflect.

'I wonder who Gentleman-Once was?' said Joe to Mitchell. 'Could he have been Danny, or old "Awful Example" back there at the shanty?'

'Dunno,' said Mitchell. He puffed three long puffs at his pipe, and then said, reflectively,—

'I've heard men tell their own stories before to-night, Joe.'

It was Joe who wanted to think now.

. . . . . .

About four o'clock Mitchell woke and stood up. Peter was lying rolled in his blanket with his face turned to the west. The moon was low, the shadows had shifted back, and the light was on Peter's face. Mitchell stood looking at him reverently, as a grown son might who sees his father

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asleep for the first time. Then Mitchell quietly got some boughs and stuck them in the ground at a little distance from Peter's head, to shade his face from the bright moonlight; and then he turned in again to sleep till the sun woke him.

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THE GHOSTS OF MANY CHRISTMASES

DID you ever trace back your Christmas days?—right back to the days when you were innocent and Santa Claus was real. At times you thought you were very wicked, but you never realise how innocent you were until you've grown up and knocked about the world.

Let me think!

Christmas in an English village, with bare hedges and trees, and leaden skies that lie heavy on our souls as we walk, with overcoat and umbrella, sons of English exiles and exiles in England, and think of bright skies and suns overhead, and sweeps of country disappearing into the haze, and blue mountain ranges melting into the azure of distant lower skies, and curves of white and yellow sand beaches, and runs of shelving yellow sandstone sea-walls—and the glorious Pacific! Sydney Harbour at sunrise, and the girls we took to Manly Beach.

Christmas in a London flat. Gloom and slush and soot. It is not the cold that affects us Australians so much, but the horrible gloom. We get heart-sick for the sun.

Christmas at sea—three Christmases, in fact—one going saloon from Sydney to Westralia early in the Golden Nineties with funds; and one, the Christmas after next, coming back steerage with nothing but the clothes we'd slept in. All of which was bad judgment on our part—the order and manner of our going and coming should have been reversed.

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Christmas in a hessian tent in 'th' Westren,' with so many old mates from the East that it was just old times over again. We had five pounds of corned beef and a kerosene tin to boil it in; and while we were talking of old things the skeleton of a kangaroo dog grabbed the beef out of the boiling water and disappeared into the scrub—which made it seem more like old times than ever.

Christmas going to New Zealand, with experience, by the ss. *Tasmania*. We had plum duff, but it was too 'soggy' for us to eat. We dropped it overboard, lest it should swamp the boat—and it sank to the ooze. The *Tasmania* was saved on that occasion, but she foundered next year outside Gisborn. Perhaps the cook had made more duff. There was a letter from a sweetheart of mine amongst her mails when she went down; but that's got nothing to do with it, though it made some difference in my life.

Christmas on a new telegraph line with a party of lining gangmen in New Zealand. There was no duff nor roast because there was no firewood within twenty miles. The cook used to pile armfuls of flax-sticks under the billies, and set light to them when the last man arrived in camp.

Christmas in Sydney, with a dozen invitations out to dinner. The one we accepted was to a sensible Australian Christmas dinner; a typical one, as it should be, and will be before the Commonwealth is many years old. Everything cold except the vegetables, the hose playing on the verandah and vines outside, the men dressed in sensible pyjama-like suits, and the women and girls fresh and cool and jolly, instead of being hot and cross and looking like boiled carrots, and feeling like boiled rags, and having headaches after dinner, as would have been the case had they broiled over the fire in a hot kitchen all the blazing forenoon to cook a scalding, indigestible dinner, as many Australian women do, and for no other reason than that it was the

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fashion in England. One of those girls was very pretty and—ah, well!—

Christmas dinner in a greasy Sydney sixpenny restaurant, that opened a few days before with brass band going at full blast at the door by way of advertisement. "Roast-beef, one! Cabbage and potatoes, one! Plum-pudding, two!" etc., etc. (That was the first time I dined to music.) The Christmas dinner was a good one, but my appetite was spoilt by the expression of the restaurant keeper, a big man with a heavy jowl, who sat by the door with a cold eye on the sixpences, and didn't seem to have much confidence in human nature.

Christmas—no, that was New Year—on the Warrego River, Out-Back (an alleged river with a sickly stream that looked like bad milk). We spent most of that night hunting round in the dark and feeling on the ground for camel and horse droppings with which to build fires and make smoke round our camp to keep off the mosquitoes. The mosquitoes started at sunset and left off at daybreak, when the flies got to work again.

Christmas dinner under a brush shearing-shed. Mutton and plum-pudding—and fifty miles from Beer!

An old Bush friend of mine, one Jimmy Nowlett, who ranked as a bullock-driver, told me of a Christmas time he had. He was cut off by the floods with his team, and had nothing to eat for four days but potatoes and honey. He said potatoes dipped in honey weren't so bad; but he had to sleep on bullock yokes laid on the ground to keep him out of the water, and he got a toothache that paralysed him all down one side.

And speaking of plum-pudding, I consider it one of the most barbarous institutions of the British. It is a childish, silly, savage superstition; it must have been a savage inspiration, looking at it all round—but then it isn't so long since the British were savages.

I got a letter last year from a mate of mine in West

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Australia—prospecting the awful desert out beyond White-Feather—telling me all about a 'perish' he did on plum-pudding. He and his mates were camped at the Boulder Soak with some three or four hundred miles—mostly sand and dust—between them and the nearest grocer's shop. They ordered a case of mixed canned provisions from Perth to reach them about Christmas. They didn't believe in plum-pudding—there are a good many British institutions that Bushmen don't believe in—but the cook was a new-chum, and he said he'd go home to his mother if he didn't have plum-pudding for Christmas, so they ordered a can for him. Meanwhile, they hung out on kangaroo and damper and the knowledge that it couldn't last for ever. It was in a terrible drought, and the kangaroos used to come into the 'Soak' for water, and they were too weak to run. Later on, when wells were dug, the kangaroos used to commit suicide in them—there was generally a kangaroo in the well in the morning.

The storekeeper packed the case of tinned dog, etc., but by some blunder he or his man put the label on the wrong box, and it went per rail, per coach, per camel, and the last stage per boot, and reached my friends' camp on Christmas Eve, to their great joy. My friend broke the case open by the light of the camp fire.

'Here, Jack!' he said, tossing out a can, 'here's your plum-pudding.'

He held the next can in his hand a moment longer and read the label twice.

'Why! he's sent two,' he said, 'and I'm sure I only ordered one. Never mind—Jack'll have a tuck-out.'

He held the next can close to the fire and blinked at it hard.

'I'm damned if he hasn't sent three tins of plum-pudding. Never mind, we'll manage to scoff some of it between us. You're in luck's way this trip, Jack, and no mistake.'

He looked harder still at the fourth can; then he read

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the labels on the other tins again to see if he'd made a mistake.

He didn't tell me what he said then, but a milder mate suggested that the storekeeper had sent half a dozen tins by mistake. But when they reached the seventh can the language wasn't even fit to be written down on a piece of paper and handed up to the magistrate. The storekeeper had sent them an unbroken case of canned plum-pudding, and probably by this time he was wondering what had become of that blanky case of duff.

The kangaroos disappeared about this time and my friend tells me that he and his mates had to live for a mortal fortnight on canned plum-pudding. They tried it cold and they tried it boiled, they tried it baked, they had it fried, and they had it toasted, they had it for breakfast, dinner and tea. They had nothing else to think, or talk, or argue and quarrel about; and they dreamed about it every night, my friend says. It wasn't a joke—it gave them the nightmare and day-horrors.

They tried it with salt. They picked as many of the raisins out as they could and boiled it with salt kangaroo. They tried to make Yorkshire pudding out of it; but it was too rich.

My friend was experimenting and trying to discover a simple process for separating the ingredients of plum-pudding when a fresh supply of provisions came along. He says he was never so sick of anything in his life, and he has had occasion to be sick of a good many things.

The newchum Jackeroo is still alive, but he won't ever eat plum-pudding any more, he says. It cured him of home-sickness. He wouldn't eat it even if his bride made it.

. . . . . .

Christmas on the goldfields in the last of the Roaring Days, in the palmy days of Gulgong and those fields. Let's see! it must be nearly thirty years ago! Oh! how the time goes by!

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Santa Claus, young, fresh-faced and eager; Santa Claus, blonde and flaxen; Santa Claus, dark; Santa Claus with a brogue and Santa Claus speaking broken English; Santa Claus as a Chinaman (Sun Tong Lee & Co., Storekeepers), with strange, delicious sweets that melted in our mouths, and rum toys and Chinese dolls for the children.

Lucky diggers who were with difficulty restrained from putting pound notes and nuggets and expensive lockets and things into the little ones' stockings. Santa Claus in flannel shirt and clay-covered moleskins. Diggers who bought lollies by the pound and sent the little ones home with as much as they could carry.

Diggers who gave a guinea or more for a toy for a child that reminded them of some other child at home. Diggers who took as many children as they could gather on short notice into a store, slapped a five-pound note down on the counter and told the little ones to call for whatever they wanted. Who set a family of poor children side by side on the counter and called for a box of mixed children's boots—the best—and fitted them on with great care and anxiety and frequent inquiries as to whether they pinched. Who stood little girls and boys on the counter and called for the most expensive frocks, the latest and best in sailor suits, and the brightest ribbons; and things came long distances by bullock dray and were expensive in those days. Impressionable diggers—and most of them were—who threw nuggets to singers, and who, sometimes, slipped a parcel into the hands of a little boy or girl, with instructions to give it to an elder sister (or young mother, perhaps) whom the digger had never spoken to, only worshipped from afar off. And the elder sister or young mother, opening the parcel, would find a piece of jewellery or a costly article of dress, and wonder who sent it.

Ah, the wild generosity of luck-intoxicated diggers of those days! and the reckless generosity of the drinkers. 'We thought it was going to last for ever!'

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'If I don't spend it on the bairns I'll spend it on the drink,' Sandy Burns used to say. 'I ha' nane o' me own, an' the lass who was to gi' me bairns, she couldn't wait.'

Sandy had kept steady and travelled from one end of the world to the other, and roughed it and toiled for five years, and the very day he bottomed his golden hole on the Brown Snake Lead at Happy Valley he got a letter from his girl in Scotland to say she had grown tired of waiting and was married. Then he drank, and drink and luck went together.

Gulgong on New Year's Eve! Rows and rows of lighted tents and camp fires, with a clear glow over it all. Bonfires on the hills and diggers romping round them like big boys. Tin kettling—gold dishes and spoons, and fiddles, and hammers on pointing anvils, and sticks and empty kerosene tins (*they* made a row); concertinas and cornets, shot-guns, pistols and crackers, all sorts of instruments, and 'Auld Lang Syne' in one mighty chorus.

And now—a wretched little pastoral town; a collection of glaring corrugated-iron hip-roofs, and maybe a rotting propped-up bark or weatherboard humpy or two—relics of the Roaring Days; a dried-up storekeeper and some withered hags; a waste of caved-in holes with rain-washed mullock-heaps and quartz and gravel glaring in the sun; thistles and burrs where old bars were; drought, dryness, desolation and goats.

Lonely graves in the Bush and grey old diggers here and there, anywhere in the world, doing anything for a living, lonely yet because of the girls who couldn't wait, but prospecting and fossicking here and there, and dreaming still.

They thought it was going to last for ever.

. . . . . .

Christmas at Eurunderee Creek, amongst the old selection farms in the western spurs of the Blue Mountains. They used to call it 'Th' Pipeclay' thirty years ago, but

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the old black names have been restored. They make plum-puddings yet, weeks beforehand, and boil them for hours and hang them in cloths to the rafters to petrify; then they take them down and boil them again. On Christmas Eve the boys cut boughs or young pines on the hills, and drag them home and lash them to the verandah posts.

Ted has turned up with his wife and children from his selection out-back. The wheat is in and shearing is over on the big stations. Tom—steady-going old Tom—clearing or fencing or dam-sinking up-country, hides his tools in the scrub and gets his horse and rides home. Aunt Emma (to everyone's joy) has arrived from Sydney with presents (astonishing bargains in frocks, etc.) and marvellous descriptions of town life.

Joe, 'poor' Mary's husband, who has been droving in Queensland since the Christmas before last—while poor Mary, who is afraid to live alone, shared a skillion and the family quarrels at home—Joe rides day and night and reaches home at sunrise on Christmas morning, tired and dusty, gaunt and haggard, but with his last cheque intact. He kisses his wife and child and throws himself on the bed to sleep till dinner time, while Mary moves round softly, hushes the baby, dresses it and herself, lays out Joe's clean things, and bends over him now and then, and kisses him, perhaps, as he sleeps.

In the morning the boys and some of the men go down to the creek for a swim in the big shady pool under the she-oaks, and take their Sunday clothes with them and dress there.

Some of them ride into town to church, and some of the women and children drive in in spring-carts—the children to go to Sunday school, leaving mother and the eldest daughter—usually a hard-worked, disappointed, short-tempered girl—at home to look after the cooking.

There is some anxiety (mostly on mother's part) about Jim, who is 'wild,' and is supposed to be somewhere Out-

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Back. There was 'a piece of blue paper' out for Jim on account of sweating (illegally using) a horse, but his mother or father has got a hint—given in a kindly way by the police-sergeant—that Jim is free to come home and stay at home if he behaves himself. (There is usually a horse missing when Jim goes Out-Back.)

Jim turns up all right—save that he has no money—and is welcomed with tearful affection by his favourite sister Mary, shakes hands silently with his father, and has a long whispered conversation with his mother, which leaves him very subdued. His brothers forbear to sneer at him, partly because it is Christmas, partly on mother's account, and thirdly, because Jim can use his hands. Aunt Emma, who is fond of him, cheers him up wonderfully.

The family sit down to dinner. 'An old mate of your father's'—a bearded old digger—has arrived and takes the place of honour. ('I knowed yer father, sonny, on the diggings long afore any of you was ever thought on.')

The family have only been a few hours together, yet there is an undercurrent of growling, that, to the stranger, mysterious yet evident undercurrent of nastiness and resentment which goes on in all families and drags many a promising young life down. But Aunt Emma and the old mate make things brighter, and so the dinner—of hot roast and red-hot plum-pudding—passes off fairly well.

The men sleep the afternoon away and wake up bathed in perspiration and helpless; some of the women have headaches. After tea they gather on the verandah in the cool of the evening, and that's the time when the best sides of their natures and the best parts of the past have a chance of coming uppermost, and perhaps they begin to feel a bit sorry that they are going to part again.

The local races or 'sports' on Boxing Day. There is nothing to keep the boys home over New Year. Ted and his wife go back to their lonely life on their selection; Tom returns to his fencing or tank-sinking contract; Jim,

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who has borrowed 'a couple of quid' from Tom, goes Out-Back with strong resolutions for the New Year, and shears 'stragglers,' breaks in horses, cooks and clerks for survey parties, and gambles and drinks, and gets into trouble again. Maybe Joe 'knocks about' the farm a bit before going into the Great North West with another mob of cattle.

The last time I saw the Old Year out at Eurunderee the bush fires were burning all over the ranges, and looked like great cities lighted up. No need for bonfires then.

. . . . . .

Christmas in Bourke, the metropolis of the great pastoral scrubs and plains, 500 miles west, with the thermometer 100-and-something-scarey in the shade. The rough, careless shearers come in from stations many dusty miles out in the scrubs to have their Christmas sprees, to drink and 'shout' and fight—and have the horrors some of them—and be run in and locked up with difficulty, within sound of a church-going bell.

The Bourke Christmas is a very beery and exciting one. The hotels shut up in front on Christmas Day to satisfy the law (or out of consideration for the feelings of the sergeant in charge of the police-station), and open behind to satisfy the public, who are supposed to have made the law.

Sensible cold dinners are the fashion in Bourke, I think, with the hose going, and free-and-easy costumes.

The free males take their blankets and sleep in the 'park'; the women sleep with doors and windows open, and the married men on mattresses on the verandahs across the open doors—in case of accidents.

Christmas in Sydney, though Christmas holidays are not so popular as Easter, or even Anniversary Day, in the Queen city of the South. 'Buses, electric, cable and the old steam trams crowded with holiday-makers with baskets. Harbour boats loaded down to the water's edge with harbour picnic-parties. 'A trip round the Harbour and to the

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head of Middle Harbour one shilling return!' Strings of tourist trains running over the Blue Mountains and the Great Zigzag, and up the coast to Gosford and Brisbane Water, and down the south coast to Beautiful Illawarra, until after New Year. Hundreds of young fellows going out with tents to fish in lonely bays or shoot in the mountains, and rough it properly like Bushmen—not with deck chairs, crockery, a piano and servants. For you can camp in the grand and rugged solitude of the Bush within a stone's throw of the city, so to speak.

Jolly camps and holiday parties all round the beautiful bays of the harbour, and up and down the coast, and all close to home. Camps in the moonlight on sandy beaches under great dark bluffs and headlands, where yellow, shelving, sandstone cliffs run, broken only by sandy-beached bays, and where the silver-white breakers leap and roar.

And Manly Beach on a holiday! Thousands of people in fresh summer dress, hundreds of bare-legged, happy children running where the 'blue sea over the white sand rolls,' racing in and out with the rollers, playing with the glorious Pacific. Manly—'Our Village'—Manly Beach, where we used to take our girls, with the most beautiful harbour in the world on one side, and the width of the grandest ocean on the other. Ferny gullies and 'fairy dells' to north and south, and every shady nook its merry party or happy couple.

Manly Beach—I remember five years ago (oh, how the time goes by!)—and two names that were written together in the sand when the tide was coming in.

And the boat home in the moonlight, past the Heads, where we felt the roll of the ocean, and the moonlit harbour—and the harbour lights of Sydney—the grandest of them all.

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THE MEN WHO MADE AUSTRALIA

(WRITTEN ON THE OCCASION OF THE PRINCE OF WALES'S VISIT TO AUSTRALIA)

THERE'LL be royal time in Sydney for the Cuff and Collar Push,
There'll be lots of dreary drivel and clap-trap
From the men who own Australia, but who never knew the Bush,
And who could not point their runs out on the map.
Oh, the daily Press will grovel as it never did before,
There'll be many flags of welcome in the air,
And the Civil Service poet he shall write odes by the score—
But the men who made the land will not be there.

You shall meet the awful lady of the latest Birthday knight—
(She is trying to be English, don't-cher-know?)
You shall hear the empty mouthing of the champion blatherskite,
You shall hear the boss of local drapers blow.
There'll be 'mayahs' from the counter, tailors' dummies from the fleet,
And to represent Australia here to-day,
There's the toady with his card-case and his cab in Downing Street;
But the men who made Australia—where are they?

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Call across the blazing sand wastes of the Never-Never Land!
There are some who will not answer yet a while,
Some whose bones rot in the mulga or lie bleaching on the sand,
Died of thirst to win the land another mile.
Thrown from horses, ripped by cattle, lost on deserts; and the weak
Mad through loneliness or drink (no matter which),
Drowned in floods or dead of fever by the sluggish slimy creek—
These are men who died to make the Wool-Kings rich.

Call across the scrubby ridges where they clear the barren soil,
And the gaunt Bush-women share the work of men—
Toil and loneliness for ever—hardship, loneliness and toil—
Where the brave, drought-ruined farmer starts again!
Call across the boundless sheep-runs of a country cursed for sheep—
Call across the awful scrublands west of Bourke!
But they have no time to listen—they have scarcely time to sleep—
For the men who conquer deserts have to work.

Dragged behind the crawling sheep-flock on the hot and dusty plain,
They must make a cheque to feed the wife and kids—
Riding night watch round the cattle in the pelting, freezing rain,
While world-weariness is pressing down the lids.
And away on far out-stations, seldom touched by Heaven's breath,
In a loneliness that smothers love and hate—
Where they never take white women—there they live the living death
With a half-caste or a black-gin for a mate.

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They must toil to save the gaunt stock in the blazing
months of drought,
When the stinging, blinding blight is in men's eyes—
On the wretched, burnt selections, on the big runs further out
Where the sand-storm rises lurid to the skies.
Not to profit when the grass is waving waist high after rain,
And the mighty clip of wool comes rolling in—
For the Wool-King goes to Paris with his family again
And the gold that souls are sacrified to win.

There are carriages in waiting for the swells from over-sea,
There are banquets in the latest London style,
While the men who made Australia live on damper junk
and tea—
But the quiet voices whisper, 'Wait a while!'
For the sons of all Australia they were born to conquer fate—
And, where charity and friendship are sincere,
Where a sinner is a brother and a stranger is a mate,
There the future of a nation's written clear.

Ay, the cities claim the triumphs of a land they do not know,
But all empty is the day they celebrate!
For the men who made Australia federated long ago,
And the men to rule Australia—they can wait.
Though the bed may be the rough bunk or the gum leaves
or the sand,
And the roof for half the year may be the sky—
There are men amongst the Bushmen who were born to save
the land!
And they'll take their places sternly by-and-by.

There's a whisper on the desert though the sunset breeze
hath died
In the scrubs, though not a breath to stir a bough,
There's a murmur, not of waters, down the Lachlan River
side,
'Tis the spirit of Australia waking now!

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There's the weird hymn of the drought-night on the western water-shed,
Where the beds of unlocked rivers crack and parch,
'Tis the dead that we have buried, and our great unburied dead,
Who are calling now on living men to march!

Round the camp fire of the fencers by the furthest panel west,
In the men's hut by the muddy billabong,
On the Great North-Western Stock-routes where the drovers never rest,
They are sorting out the right things from the wrong!
In the shearers' hut the slush lamp shows a haggard, stern-faced man
Preaching war against the Wool-King to his mates!
And wherever go the billy, water-bag and frying-pan,
They are drafting future histories of states!

. . . . . .

It was tramp and trot and canter still towards the setting sun,
Through the everlasting mulga and the sand,
And we left the old men slaving on the farms that young men won,
For there wasn't room for us on settled land.
But we've voted back in thousands, we who went by twos and threes,
For the land won by our fathers and their sons,
And if ever Greed should dare us that has followed over seas,
'Twill be trot, trot, trot and canter with the guns.

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